Chan 3008 book cover.qxd 15/10/07 10:38 am Page 1

Chan 3008(2)

David Parry

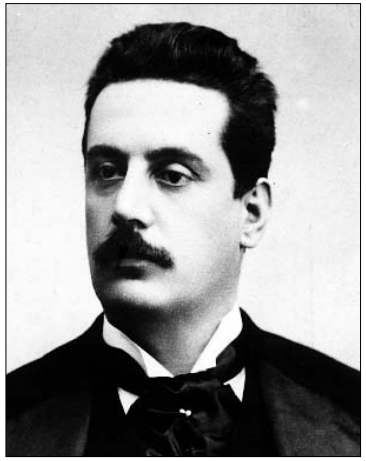
CHANDOS
OPERA IN ENGLISH

Puccini

La bohème

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION

CHAN 3008 BOOK.qxd 15/10/07 10:39 am Page 2



AKG

Giacomo Puccini

Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)

La bohème (A Bohemian Life)

Opera in four acts

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica after Henry Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème*

English version by William Grist and Percy Pinkerton, with amendments by David Parry

Marcello, a painter ..... Alan Opie *baritone*
Rodolfo, a poet ..... Dennis O'Neill *tenor*
Colline, a philosopher ..... Alastair Miles *bass*
Schaunard, a musician ..... William Dazeley *baritone*
Benoit, the landlord ..... Andrew Shore *baritone*
Mimì ..... Cynthia Haymon *soprano*
Parpignol, a toy-seller ..... Mark Milhofer *tenor*
Musetta ..... Marie McLaughlin *soprano*
Alcindoro, a state councillor ..... Andrew Shore
A Hawker ..... Peter Hall *tenor*
Customs Official ..... Simon Preece *baritone*
Customs Sergeant ..... Paul Parfitt *bass-baritone*

Geoffrey Mitchell Choir
The Peter Kay Children's Choir
Philharmonia Orchestra
Brad Cohen assistant conductor
David Parry conductor

CHAN 3008 BOOK.qxd 15/10/07 10:39 am Page 4

COMPACT DISC ONE

Act I **35:26**

1 Marcello – 'This Red Sea Passage feels deep and chill to me' 4:21 [p. 54]
(Marcello, Rodolfo, Colline)

2 Colline – 'Profound and thoughtful!' 1:21 [p. 56]
(Colline, Marcello, Rodolfo)

3 Rodolfo – 'Firewood!' 3:48 [p. 57]
(Rodolfo, Marcello, Colline, Schaunard)

4 Benoit – 'Hello' 5:33 [p. 59]
(Benoit, Marcello, Schaunard, Colline, Rodolfo)

5 Rodolfo – 'I'll stay here, I must complete my article' 1:00 [p. 63]
(Rodolfo, Marcello, Colline, Schaunard)

6 Rodolfo – 'No inspiration' 2:44 [p. 63]
(Rodolfo, Mimì)

7 Mimì – 'Oh! How dreadful!' 1:40 [p. 65]
(Mimì, Rodolfo)

8 Rodolfo – 'Your tiny hand is frozen!' 4:40 [p. 66]
(Rodolfo)

9 Mimì – 'Yes, I'm always called Mimì' 5:17 [p. 66]
(Mimì, Rodolfo)

10 Schaunard – 'Hey! Rodolfo!' 0:48 [p. 67]
(Schaunard, Colline, Marcello, Rodolfo, Mimì)

11 Rodolfo – 'Lovely maid in the moonlight' 4:16 [p. 68]
(Rodolfo, Mimì)

Act II **19:20**

12 Hawkers – 'Come, buy my oranges!' 2:48 [p. 69]
(Chorus, Schaunard, Rodolfo, Mimì, Colline, Marcello)

13 Rodolfo – 'What is it?' 3:18 [p. 71]
(Rodolfo, Mimì, Colline, Schaunard, Marcello, Chorus)

14 Children – 'Long live Parpignol!' 3:12 [p. 73]
(Chorus, Schaunard, Marcello, Colline, Rodolfo, Mimì, Alcindoro, Musetta)

15 Marcello – 'You had better ask me' 2:40 [p. 75]
(Marcello, Musetta, Alcindoro, Colline, Schaunard, Chorus, Rodolfo, Mimì)

16 Musetta – 'As thro' the street I wander' 5:04 [p. 76]
(Musetta, Marcello, Alcindoro, Mimì, Rodolfo, Colline, Schaunard)

17 Colline – 'Who had him bring it?' 2:17 [p. 79]
(Colline, Schaunard, Rodolfo, Marcello, Chorus, Musetta, Mimì,)

TT 54:57

COMPACT DISC TWO

Act III **26:11**

1 Scavengers – 'Hallo! You soldiers! Admit us!' 3:41 [p. 81]
(Chorus, Customs Official, Musetta)

2 Mimì – 'Oh, please sir, tell me, do you know the tavern' 1:46 [p. 82]
(Mimì, Customs Sergeant, Customs Official)

3 Marcello – 'Mimì!' – Mimì – 'I hoped that I would find you here' 4:57 [p. 83]
(Marcello, Mimì)

4 Rodolfo – 'Marcello, you're outside here' 1:45 [p. 84]
(Rodolfo, Marcello, Mimì)

5 Rodolfo – 'Mimì is fickle-hearted' 1:25 [p. 84]
(Rodolfo, Marcello)

CHAN 3008 BOOK.qxd 15/10/07 10:39 am Page 6

6	Rodolfo – 'Mimì's so sickly, so ailing!' (Rodolfo, Marcello, Mimì)	3:29 [p. 85]
7	Mimì – 'To the home that she left' (Mimì)	3:13 [p. 86]
8	Rodolfo – 'Then it really is over' (Rodolfo, Mimì, Marcello, Musetta)	5:55 [p. 86]
	Act IV	**29:45**
9	Marcello – 'In a coupé?' (Marcello, Rodolfo)	1:13 [p. 88]
10	Rodolfo – 'Oh Mimì, our love is over' (Rodolfo, Marcello, Schaunard, Colline)	5:47 [p. 89]
11	Colline – 'Gavotta' (Colline, Marcello, Rodolfo, Schaunard)	1:47 [p. 91]
12	Musetta – 'It's Mimì! It's Mimì who is with me' (Musetta, Rodolfo, Schaunard, Mimì, Marcello)	6:04 [p. 92]
13	Colline – 'Venerable garment, listen' (Colline, Schaunard)	2:38 [p. 94]
14	Mimì – 'Have they left us?' (Mimì, Rodolfo, Schaunard)	6:53 [p. 95]
15	Musetta – 'Sleeping?' – Rodolfo – 'Just resting' (Musetta, Rodolfo, Marcello, Mimì)	2:16 [p. 96]
16	Rodolfo – 'What did the doctor say?' (Rodolfo, Marcello, Musetta, Schaunard, Colline)	2:58 [p. 97]
		TT 56:03

Giacomo Puccini: La bohème

La bohème, we note, retains its French title even when the Italian opera is sung in English. The *Times*' critic reviewing the British premiere observed that a literal translation would be misleading because this was not really an opera about Bohemia. The English vocal score was entitled *The Bohemians*, and that, he suggested, would suit better. The reason for his thinking along these lines lay no doubt in the fact that the performance had taken place not among the international crowd at London's Covent Garden but in the Carl Rosa Company's season at the Theatre Royal in Manchester; and it had been given in English.

The critic did not object to that; he did think, however, that it might have been given in rather *better* English. 'Her food most predilected is the heart' was a sentence that took his fancy, and he had great fun with 'And I, Marcel, will not hide you'. He urged immediate and thorough revision, which was probably carried out as the offending sentences were not part of the translation which remained in general use for the next half-century. That, of course, included such highlights as 'Your tiny hand is frozen', 'They call me Mimì' and 'Lovely maid in the moonlight'. It also had its share of contortions and contrivances, starting with the very first line: 'This Red Sea Passage feeleth damp and chill to me'. The last complete sentence in the opera was also memorable in that old translation: 'What's the meaning of these comings and goings, these glances so strange?' Remarkably, all these oddities of expression passed us by: we didn't really mind them, even grew rather fond of them. Good, natural English would no doubt have been preferable even so.

Whatever the textual shortcomings of that first performance, the Manchester public loved it, and the night of 22 April 1897 made history. Next day (next day, note) Londoners could read of a resounding success. Puccini had 'treated his subject with the delicacy, lightness, power and force of a master', and 'the performance was in almost every respect a genuine triumph for all concerned'. Puccini, who had been very downcast since his arrival in the city, cheered up. Tito Ricordi, the publisher, who was with him (a great joker too, and able, apparently, to sing any part in the opera himself) was jubilant that his idea of placing the premiere outside

London had worked so well. And he was probably right: when the opera came to Covent Garden it met with little interest and was dismissed in the press as 'not stimulating enough to be heard often'.

Its later success in the capital has been attributed to Nellie Melba's advocacy and her lovely singing in the role of Mimì. That played its part no doubt, especially with the fashionable people at Covent Garden who might not have taken very enthusiastically to an opera set in a garret. But almost certainly the piece would have prevailed eventually by its own appeal, as it did throughout the operatic world. Another reason sometimes given to explain its popularity is that 'ordinary folk' could identify with the characters, and, as it was rather patronizingly expressed, the Woolworth's shop-girl could see herself in Mimì. Melody and sentiment have been thought sufficient both to account for the opera's enduring charm and to discredit its stronger qualities and deeper effect. It is interesting that in England, where the first-night audience so decisively took the opera to its heart, a distaste for Puccini's work as a whole should have prevailed for so long among so many musicians and music-lovers. Even as late as 1944 Peter Pears could write to Benjamin Britten 'It's dirty music': he was singing Rodolfo in a fresh, unmawkish production by Sadler's Wells, yet felt somehow soiled by it.

If this has changed, it is partly due to a steadily growing appreciation of the score as a compound, its elements united with a skill that engages the analytical mind and makes of the work something quite different from the *comédie larmoyante* perceived by its detractors. Books such as Mosco Carner's critical biography (1958) and (shorter but no less suggestive) Edward Greenfield's *Puccini: Keeper of the Seal*, also 1958, brought intelligence to the work of this emotional composer, and the effect was not a dichotomy in which cerebral and intuitive processes were separate and distinct but rather a symbiosis, emotional and intellectual responses developing as one. 'Learning' *La bohème* in this way over the years has been a process of steady enrichment. The structure of each act, its relation to the others, the inter-relating of motifs, all come to recognition gradually, as such things will generally do in a great work of art. Strangely (it may seem), the process is comparable to that of 'learning' Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land': bits stick in the memory like fragments of melody, and gradually they connect, their significance clarifying as it deepens.

Take Act II, for instance. It is a small

masterpiece in itself, with its profusion of melodic ideas (eight come to mind immediately), the variety of its texture (solo and choral passages, solo voices in ensemble, a single child's voice or a voice from off-stage, off-stage military band, full forces combined), the range of its 'language' (the tenderness of lovers, the Christmas Eve excitement of the crowd, tantrums and expostulations, lilting charm and ecstatic rejuvenation). But all of that, and the wonderful joinery of these many parts, is in a sense incidental to the act's effectiveness in its place within the work as a whole. It is the scherzo movement of the symphony, a brilliant *allegro* in major key; also an assertion, within what is to be a tragic context, of the human comedy, where we see the individuals in perspective as part of the larger scene. Moreover, in much (though not all) the music is 'organic', related closely to the body of the other, longer and more serious acts. Thus, the lovers' phrases form a delicately elusive variation on the love music of Act I. Even the pattern of the introductory bars for brass is related to another opening sequence, that of Act III, where the parallel chords have no middle note to give them warmth, but are left hollow and chilly as the snowy dawn on a day when fears cast a deepening shadow and hopes fade.

The whole fabric of the opera is shot through with contrast, which bears the imprint of the famous sentence in Henry Murger's novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* from which Puccini and his librettists took their inspiration: 'A gay life but a terrible one'. The *Times'* critic took this up too, and quoted further from Murger. These 'bohemians', he says, are people of extremes, both stoical and spendthrift, adapting to the changing winds of fortune:

> Rain or dust, cold or heat; nothing stops these bold adventurers. When want possesses them, abstemious as anchorites; but if a little fortune falls into their hands, see them ride forth on the most ruinous fancies.

The straightforward, down-the-middle divisions of the first and fourth acts reflect this pattern of contrasts. The masculine knock-about and horseplay of the first half contrasts with the romantic lyricism of the second, and that in itself involves a further contrast, with the first act rapturous in its happiness, the fourth passionate in tragedy. The balances of the third act are more subtle. Here the contrasts are worked into the material, starting with the evocation of interior warmth and jollity with the voices and snatch of Musetta's song heard from the tavern contrasting with the cold outside and the pitiful figure of the stricken Mimì. The act culminates in the

quartet, which represents the contrasting modes of the whole opera, as the long, sad phrases of Mimì and Rodolfo combine with the essentially comic declamatory cries of Musetta and Marcello. Every so often there comes a forlorn reminder of the attic, with the four-note motif that sets the opera (and Act IV) off to such a vigorous start. And as Mimì and Rodolfo slowly leave the stage, their music gradually dying away, we think that this is how the act will end – but then comes an abrupt *fortissimo* from the orchestra, loud, sharp and final as the slamming of a door.

Partly this is Puccini the artist, rounding off his scene with a reference to its start (those two unison notes, 'ta-tum', brought the curtain up some twenty-five minutes ago). But it too is representative. Before that strike or slam of *fortissimo*, the audience will nearly always have started to clap, thinking that the act is over, trickling out with the sweet–sad music of the lovers. In this, they represent the critics of Puccini who judge before hearing him out. And in overlooking the other element in the compound of contrasts, they miss a great deal of what *La bohème* essentially is. Murger's terms, we remember, were 'gay but terrible'. If we think of *Bohème* as Mimì we might suppose that Puccini diluted this to 'sweet but sad'. In fact, the gaiety and the 'terror' (or 'the terrible') are there at the heart of the opera too. Structurally, gaiety accounts for almost half. The 'terrible' is in abeyance. We know that the Bohemians are often hungry and sometimes heartbroken, and that Mimì is frail, coughs and might die. But terror does strike. I don't believe that anybody, however sophisticated and however familiar with the work, does not feel the shock of that bleak, minor chord before poor Rodolfo's cries of 'Mimì!'. The violins lament now without restraint and the little group of cowed people on stage, comforting one another in their grief, becomes for that moment the very picture of stricken humanity.

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Synopsis

Act I
It is Christmas Eve in a garret in the Latin quarter of Paris. Rodolfo and Marcello are trying to work, but both are very cold. Rodolfo decides to burn the manuscript on which he is working, in order to provide some little heat. Their friend Colline arrives and soon two boys enter, bringing food, wine and fuel. They are followed by Schaunard who has bought the provisions and still has some money left over, and he suggests that, as it is Christmas Eve, they should eat out. Just as they are about to leave the landlord arrives with a demand for rent. They manage to avoid paying and set off, leaving Rodolfo behind to finish writing an article.

There is a knock at the door. His neighbour Mimì has called to ask for a light for her candle. As she comes in she almost faints, dropping her candle and the key to her room. When she has recovered, the two search for the key. Rodolfo finds it, but slips it into his pocket and pretends to continue the search. Soon their hands touch. He tells her about himself and she does the same. Rodolfo's friends shout up to him, but he calls down that he will meet them at the Café Momus, bringing Mimì with him.

Act II
The bohemian friends wander in the street market outside the Café Momus. On their way to the Café Mimì and Rodolfo stop and he buys Mimì a pink bonnet. They go on and she is introduced to Rodolfo's friends. The five sit down together and order food and wine. Marcello loses his temper when he sees Musetta, an old flame, walk by with an elderly and rich admirer, Alcindoro. Musetta takes a table and orders extravagantly. Marcello and Musetta both make a pretence of being indifferent to each other's presence, but eventually Musetta sends Alcindoro off to have her pinching shoe mended, and throws herself into Marcello's arms.

When the bohemians come to pay the bill they realize that they have already spent Schaunard's money so the bill is left for Alcindoro to pay!

Act III
At the city gate, the Barrière d'Enfer, on a cold February dawn, customs men search the workers as they enter the city. Marcello is working at a tavern and Mimì has come to ask him to talk to Rodolfo as his jealousy is ruining their relationship. Marcello agrees and sends her home. Rodolfo has been asleep inside and when he comes out Mimì hides close by. She overhears Rodolfo telling Marcello that she is dangerously ill and that he believes that her only chance of living is to leave him and his life of poverty. Mimì reveals her presence by a coughing fit. Mimì and Rodolfo decide not to part until spring comes. Meanwhile Marcello, who has gone back into the tavern, accuses Musetta of flirting with a stranger, and the two end their relationship.

Act IV
It is spring and Rodolfo and Marcello are alone again. Schaunard and Colline enter with some

meagre food and the four friends pretend that they are having a dinner party with dancing. When they are all enjoying themselves Musetta bursts in to tell them that Mimì is below, too weak to even climb the stairs. Rodolfo rushes to help and the others prepare a bed for her. While Rodolfo looks after Mimì, Musetta explains to him that Mimi wanted to come back to the garret where she had been so happy with him. Musetta, Colline and Schaunard leave Mimì and Rodolfo alone and the two remember the love that they shared and how they first met. The friends gradually return, but it is too late. Mimì is dead.

Alan Opie was born in Cornwall and studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the London Opera Centre. His career began with English National Opera (then Sadler's Wells) where he was appointed principal baritone while still a student. Among the roles he has performed there include the title roles in *The Barber of Seville*, and Busoni's *Dr Faust*, Germont (*La traviata*), Eisenstein and Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), Sharpless (*Madam Butterfly*), Papageno (*The Magic Flute*), Sancho Panza (*Don Quixote*) and Taddeo (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*).

He has combined his work at English National Opera with performances for the other major UK opera companies (such as *Luisa Miller* for Opera North), while his international career has taken him to Bayreuth (Beckmesser), and the opera houses of Chicago, Santa Fé, Paris, Amsterdam, Vienna, Brussels and Berlin. His many recordings include the *Grammy* Award-winning *Peter Grimes* (for Chandos), *Gloriana*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, the title role in Dallapiccola's *Ulisse*, and *The Barber of Seville* and *Pagliacci* (for Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

Born in Wales of Irish and Welsh parents, **Dennis O'Neill** is one of the world's leading tenors and a specialist in the works of Verdi. He has enjoyed a long association with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where his roles have included Rodolfo (*La bohème*), the Duke (*Rigoletto*), Pinkerton, Edgar (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Macduff (*Macbeth*), Gustave (*Un ballo in maschera*), Foresto (*Attila*), Otello, Don Carlos, Radames (*Aida*) and Jacopo (*I due Foscari*). He has appeared in the United States with the Metropolitan Opera and Chicago Lyric Opera, and has given many concert performances there.

A frequent guest at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich, his debut in *Un ballo in maschera* was followed by a new production of *Il trovatore* with Giuseppe Sinopoli, and appearances in *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Tosca*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Aida*. Dennis O'Neill is also a busy concert artist and has sung throughout Europe with conductors including Riccardo Muti, Sir Colin Davis and Sir Simon Rattle. Recordings include *Tosca* and *Cavalleria rusticana* (both for Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation), *Der Rosenkavalier* under Sir Georg Solti, *Die Fledermaus*, *Macbeth*, and *La fanciulla del West*.

Alastair Miles, internationally recognized as one of Britain's leading singers, has sung at opera houses all over the world including the Metropolitan Opera House, Opéra national de Paris, the Bastille, Vienna, San Francisco, Amsterdam, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Roles have included Giorgio (*I Puritani*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Basilio, Figaro, the title role in *Oberto*, Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*) and Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*).

His highly successful concert career takes him worldwide, performing under such conductors as Carlo Maria Giulini, Zubin Mehta, Kurt Masur and John Eliot Gardiner. His many recordings include Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, the Verdi Requiem and Handel's *Saul* and *Agrippina*, as well as *Medea in Corinto*, *Orazi e Curiazi*, *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* and *Maria regina d'Inghilterra* (all for Opera Rara).

William Dazeley is a graduate of Jesus College, Cambridge, and he studied singing at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Prizes include the Decca–Kathleen Ferrier Prize, the Richard Tauber Prize and the Walther Gruner International Lieder Prize. His extensive operatic repertoire includes the title roles in *Don Giovanni*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Billy Budd* and *Eugene Onegin*, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Pelléas, Mowgli (Michael Berkeley's *Baa Baa Black Sheep*), Danilo (*The Merry Widow*) and the Count and Rudolph (*Der ferne Klang*). He has appeared with the Royal Opera, Opera North, Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Teatro Regio Turin, Opéra de Lyon and New Israeli Opera. Recordings include *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, Britten's *The Rescue of Penelope* and Busoni's *Dr Faust*.

Andrew Shore is now acknowledged as Britain's premier buffo baritone. Since making his English National Opera debut in 1988, roles there have included Falstaff, Dieg (in Philip Glass's *The Making of the Representative of Planet 8*), Papageno (*The Magic Flute*), Monsieur Calcul (*La belle Vivette*), Don

Pasquale and Gianni Schicchi. He has also sung with Kent Opera, Opera North, Welsh National Opera, New Israeli Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and in Lyon, Montpelier, Barcelona and Hamburg. His recordings include *The Barber of Seville* and *Tosca* (for Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation) and *The Makropulos Affair.*

Cynthia Haymon was born in Jacksonville, Florida. Since making her debut in 1985 as Thea Musgrave's *Harriet, a Woman called Moses* for the Virginia Opera world premiere, she has appeared at Covent Garden (Bess and Mimì), Glyndebourne, Hamburg, Munich and many other prestigious opera houses. She made her European debut in 1986 as Bess (*Porgy and Bess*) in Trevor Nunn's acclaimed production at Glyndebourne, and other roles include Liù (*Turandot*) in Hamburg and Munich, Amor (Gluck's *Orfeo*) at the Théâtre royal de la Monnaie, Brussels, Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) at the Bastille, Micaela (*Carmen*) with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Seattle Opera, and Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for Seattle Opera.

In concert Cynthia Haymon has appeared with the Israel Philharmonic under Kurt Masur, the London Symphony Orchestra under Myung-Whun Chung and Michael Tilson Thomas, the Cleveland Orchestra and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Her discography include's Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (for Chandos), a solo recording 'Where the Music Comes From – American Songs', and *Porgy and Bess.*

Mark Milhofer studied singing at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has studied with Neil Mackie and Bernard Dickerson. In 1992 he joined the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, appearing in *Così fan tutte* and *Death in Venice*. He has sung the title role in *Idomeneo* and Lensky (*Eugene Onegin*) at the Oxford Playhouse, Don Ramiro (*La cenerentola*) for the Teatro Regio, Parma, Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*) with the European Chamber Opera, *Dido and Aeneas* and *Curlew River* for Opera Factory, and *The Indian Queen* and concerts with the King's Consort throughout Europe.

Marie McLaughlin is now firmly established as one of the world's leading operatic sopranos. Her international successes have included Susanna at the Salzburg Festival, the Metropolitan Opera and the Royal Opera House, Zerlina, Susanna and Ilia at the Vienna State Opera, Donna Elvira and Violetta at Glyndebourne and Susanna in Geneva. She also appears regularly in Hamburg, Berlin and

Munich and has performed at English National Opera, Cologne Opera, Lausanne Opera and Los Angeles Opera.

Marie McLaughlin has appeared in concert with some of the world's greatest conductors including Leonard Bernstein, Bernard Haitink and Giuseppe Sinopoli and her recordings include Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*, under Sir Neville Marriner), Despina (*Così fan tutte*, under James Levine), and discs of songs by Schubert and Strauss. She has also appeared in video recordings of *Rigoletto*, *La traviata* and *Carmen*.

Geoffrey Mitchell's singing career encompassed a remarkably wide repertoire from early to contemporary music. This resulted in conducting invitations from the BBC and subsequently to a wider involvement with his own singers and this led to the establishment of the **Geoffrey Mitchell Choir**. Early recordings resulted in the choir's long-term involvement with Opera Rara for whom they have recorded fifteen operas, and it is currently enjoying a growing reputation with further work from the BBC and international recording companies.

The Peter Kay Children's Choir provides young singers with opportunities in opera, concerts, commercials (TV and radio), charity events, festivals and theatre productions in the UK, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Spain and the USA. Its membership is by invitation and audition, drawing participants from those already experienced in singing performance, at English National Opera where Peter Kay is Children's Adviser, Finchley Children's Music Group, New London Children's Choir, The Jennifer Lilleystone Singers and schools all over London and the south of England.

When he formed the **Philharmonia Orchestra** Walter Legge realized his great ambition of forming a hand-picked orchestra of world-class standing. The Philharmonia Orchestra gave its first concert under Sir Thomas Beecham in October 1945 and rapidly became recognized as one of the world's truly great orchestras. Many world-famous conductors have been associated with the orchestra and it remains the world's most recorded orchestra, with a discography of over one thousand recordings including operas for the Peter Moores Foundation/Opera Rara. The Philharmonia's position as 'London's leading orchestra' stems from its vitality, unique warmth of sound and commitment to commissioning and performing music by leading contemporary

composers such as the late Witold Lutoslawski, Sir Harrison Birtwistle and the orchestra's visiting composer, James MacMillan.

David Parry studied with Sergiu Celibidache and began his career as Sir John Pritchard's assistant. He made his debut with English Music Theatre and went on to become a staff conductor at Städtische Bühnen Dortmund and at Opera North. He was Music Director of Opera 80 from 1983 to 1987, and since 1992 has been the founding Music Director of the contemporary opera festival Almeida Opera.

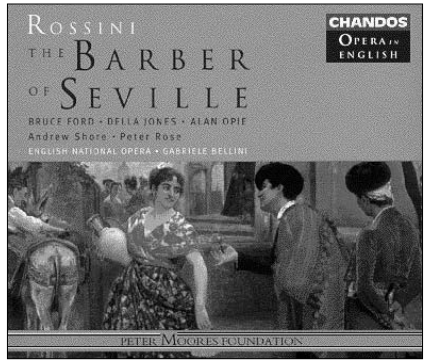
He pursues a busy career both in opera and in concert. His repertoire extends from Mozart and early nineteenth-century Italian opera to Janáček, Britten and contemporary music. In England he has appeared regularly at English National Opera and in concert with the Philharmonia. In 1996 he made his debut at the Glyndebourne Festival with *Così fan tutte*.

He is a frequent visitor to Spain where he has appeared with most of the opera companies and symphony orchestras. He gave the Spanish premiere of *Peter Grimes* in Madrid, and in 1996 he conducted the first Spanish production of *The Rake's Progress*, inaugurated two new concert halls with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and a new opera house with *Carmen*. He has also appeared in Italy, where he conducted *Ricciardo e Zoraide* in the Rossini Opera Festival at Pesaro, in France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, and in Sweden where he conducted an acclaimed production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Outside Europe David Parry has appeared at the Hong Kong International Festival, with the UNAM Symphony Orchestra at Mexico City, with a tour of *Carmen* in Japan and, in 1996, conducting a new production of *Katya Kabanova* for the New Zealand Festival.

He has recorded extensively for the Opera Rara label, the most recent issue being Donizetti's *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, which won the Prix Cecilia in Belgium and for Chandos he has conducted *Cavalleria rusticana*, the award-winning recording of *Tosca* and a recording of operatic arias with Bruce Ford.

Opera in English on Chandos



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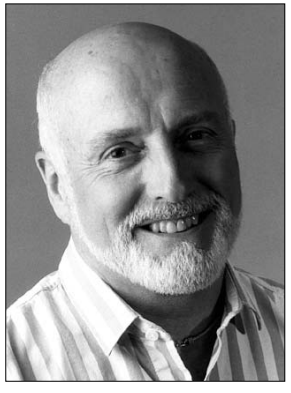
CHAN 3008 BOOK.qxd 15/10/07 10:39 am Page 18

PETER MOORES, CBE, DL

Peter Moores was born in Lancashire in 1932, son of Sir John Moores, founder of the giant Littlewoods mail order, chain store and football pools group. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he read Modern Languages. He was already fluent in German and Italian. It was opera which was his great love, however. He had worked at Glyndebourne before going up to university, and at the end of his second year he left Oxford to become a production student at the Vienna State Opera. He was required to attend morning rehearsals and evening performances, but the afternoons were free, so he enrolled as well for a four-year course at the Viennese Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

By the end of his third year Moores had produced the Viennese premiere of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, had worked as Assistant Producer at the San Carlo Opera House, Naples, the Geneva Festival and the Rome Opera, and seemed set for a successful operatic career. At this point he received a letter from his father asking him to come home as he was needed in the firm. Family loyalty was paramount and he returned to Liverpool immediately.

By 1977 he was Chairman of Littlewoods. Three years later he stepped down from the post, although still remaining on the Board, and was director of a merchant bank. From 1981 to 1983 he was a Governor of the BBC, and a Trustee of the Tate Gallery from 1978 until 1985. In May 1992 he became a Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire. And in the New Year's Honours List for 1991 he was made a CBE for his charitable services to the Arts.



Christina Burton/PMF

Peter Moores, CBE, DL

He had started his early twenties giving financial support to various young artists, several of whom – such as Geraint Evans, Joan Sutherland and Colin Davis – have since become world-famous. Moores has always been astute in his recognition of potential quality. In 1964 he set aside a large slice of his inheritance to found the Peter Moores Foundation, a charity designed to support those causes dear to his heart: to make music and the arts more accessible to more people; to give encouragement to the young; to fight discrimination and to improve race relations. 99% of the Foundation's money has come from Peter Moores's own pocket – so far about £33 million in today's money.

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION

In the field of music, the Peter Moores Foundation awards scholarships to promising young opera singers through the Royal Northern College of Music. Financial help may be given also to enable a singer to study abroad, or to work on a new role with an acknowledged expert in the repertoire.

In the last twenty years the Foundation has supported the recording of thirty-eight operas. Many are sung in English, in translation, because Moores believes that in the popular repertoire, 'what people want is to be able to follow the plot of an opera and understand what is going on'. Others are of interesting but unperformed Italian operas from the early nineteenth century (the age of *bel canto*), which are otherwise only accessible to scholars. Accessibility is the key word.

The same criterion holds where live opera is concerned. So the Foundation may sponsor Welsh National Opera, performing for a week at the Liverpool Empire and charging only £2.50 per ticket – the provision being that each ticket holder must be a first-time opera visitor – or it may fund the production at Glyndebourne of *Ermione*, a *bel canto* opera never before performed in England.

The aim is always the same: availability. 'Share and enjoy' is his philosophy.

Giacomo Puccini: La bohème

Der Titel *La bohème*, das stellen wir fest, bleibt erhalten, auch wenn die italienische Oper in einer anderen Sprache gesungen wird. Der Kritiker der *Times*, der einst die britische Erstaufführung besprach, meinte, daß eine wörtliche Übersetzung irreführend wäre, da es sich nicht in dem Sinne um eine Oper über Böhmen handle. Die englische Gesangspartitur war *The Bohemians* überschrieben, und das, meinte er, sei doch passender. Daß er so dachte, lag zweifellos daran, daß die Aufführung nicht vor internationalem Publikum im Londoner Covent Garden, sondern während der Saison der Carl Rosa Company am Theatre Royal in Manchester erfolgt war, und zwar in englischer Sprache. Dagegen hatte der Kritiker nichts; allerdings fand er, daß sie in besserem Englisch hätte gegeben werden können.

So groß die Mängel im Text der Erstaufführung gewesen sein mögen: Das Publikum in Manchester war begeistert und der Abend des 22. April 1897 ging in die Geschichte ein. Tags darauf (schon tags darauf!) erfuhren die Londoner Leser von einem durchschlagenden Erfolg. Puccini, so hieß es, habe "sein Thema mit der Feinfühligkeit, Leichtigkeit, Eindringlichkeit und Energie eines Meisters angepackt", und die Darbietung sei "in fast jeder Hinsicht ein echter Triumph für alle Beteiligten" gewesen. Puccini, der seit seiner Ankunft in der Stadt sehr niedergeschlagen war, lebte auf. Tito Ricordi, der Verleger, der ihm zur Seite stand (nebenbei ein Spaßvogel und angeblich fähig, jede Partie der Oper selbst zu singen), war überglücklich, daß sich seine Idee, die Erstaufführung außerhalb Londons zu plazieren, so bezahlt gemacht hatte. Und er hatte vermutlich recht: Als die Oper nach Covent Garden gelangte, brachte man ihr wenig Interesse entgegen und tat sie in der Presse ab als "nicht anregend genug, um des öfteren gehört zu werden".

Ihr späterer Erfolg in der britischen Hauptstadt wird der Fürsprache Nellie Melbas zugeschrieben, sowie ihrer reizvollen Darbietung in der Partie der Mimì. Das spielte zweifellos eine wichtige Rolle, vor allem bei den modebewußten Herrschaften in Covent Garden, die eine Oper, welche in einer Mansarde spielt, sonst vielleicht nicht so

enthusiastisch aufgenommen hätten. Andererseits hätte sich das Stück dank seiner eigenen Zugkraft höchstwahrscheinlich auch von selbst durchgesetzt, wie es das in der gesamten Opernwelt getan hat. Ein weiterer Grund, der manchmal genannt wird, um seine Popularität zu erklären, ist der, daß sich "gewöhnliche Leute" mit den Figuren identifizieren könnten und daß, so die eher herablassende Ansicht, die Verkäuferin sich in Mimì wiedererkennen könne. Melodienfülle und Empfindsamkeit wurden beide als ausreichend bewertet, um sowohl den dauerhaften Charme der Oper zu begründen als auch ihre stärker ins Gewicht fallenden Vorzüge und ihre Tiefenwirkung in Frage zu stellen. Es ist schon interessant, daß in England, wo das Publikum der Erstaufführung die Oper so eindeutig ins Herz geschlossen hatte, bei derart vielen Musikern und Musikliebhabern lange Zeit eine Abneigung gegen Puccinis Schaffen insgesamt herrschen sollte. Noch 1944 konnte Peter Pears an Benjamin Britten schreiben: "Es ist unsaubere Musik". Er sang damals den Rodolfo in einer frischen, ganz und gar nicht rührseligen Produktion von Sadler's Wells, fühlte sich dadurch aber dennoch irgendwie beschmutzt.

Wenn sich das gründlich geändert hat, so ist dies teilweise auf die stetig wachsende Anerkennung der Partitur als Kombination von Elementen zurückzuführen, die mit einem Geschick vereint wurden, das den analytischen Verstand anspricht und aus dem Werk etwas ganz anderes macht als die *comédie larmoyante*, die ihre Verleumder in ihr sehen. Bücher wie Mosco Carners kritische Biographie (1958) und Edward Greenfields ebenfalls 1958 erschienener Band *Puccini: Keeper of the Seal* (kürzer, aber nicht weniger aufschlußreich) gingen mit Intelligenz auf das Wirken dieses emotionalen Komponisten ein, und der Effekt war nicht der einer Dichotomie, in der Denkprozesse und Intuition getrennt und voneinander abgehoben waren, sondern vielmehr eine Symbiose emotionaler und intellektueller Entwicklung, die als Einheit erfolgt. *La bohème* über die Jahre hinweg auf diese Art zu "erfahren", war ein Vorgang stetiger Bereicherung. Die Struktur eines jeden Akts, sein Verhältnis zu den anderen, die Wechselbeziehungen der Motive – dies alles wird, wie es bei einem bedeutenden Kunstwerk generell der Fall ist, allmählich erkannt. Seltsamerweise (so mag es einem vorkommen) ist dieser Vorgang dem vergleichbar, der mit der "Erfahrung" von T.S. Eliots Gedicht "The Waste Land" verbunden ist: Fragmente bleiben im Gedächtnis haften wie Melodiefetzen und verknüpfen sich nach und nach, wobei ihre

Bedeutung mit zunehmender Vertiefung immer klarer wird.

Man nehme zum Beispiel den II. Akt. Er ist an und für sich schon ein kleines Meisterwerk, mit seiner Vielzahl melodischer Einfälle (acht fallen einem augenblicklich ein), seinem abwechslungsreichen Aufbau (Solo- und Chorpassagen, Solostimmen im Ensemble, eine einzelne Kinderstimme oder eine Stimme aus den Kulissen, Militärkapelle hinter der Bühne, alle Beteiligten zusammen) und der Bandbreite seiner "Sprache" (die Zärtlichkeit der Liebenden, die Erregung der Menge am Weihnachtsabend, Wutanfälle und Vorhaltungen, trällernder Liebreiz und ekstatische Verjüngung). Doch das alles fällt wie die wunderbare Zusammensetzung der vielen Komponenten in gewisser Hinsicht weniger ins Gewicht als die Wirksamkeit des Akts an seinem Platz innerhalb des gesamten Werks. Er ist das Scherzo der Sinfonie, ein brillantes *Allegro* in Dur; er ist ein Durchbruch für die menschliche Komödie im wesentlich tragischen Zusammenhang, der uns die Figuren in der richtigen Perspektive als Teil eines größeren Ganzen vor Augen führt. Darüber hinaus ist die Musik im wesentlichen (wenn auch nicht durchweg) "organisch" und steht in enger Beziehung zur Gesamtheit der anderen, längeren, ernsthafteren Sätze. So bilden die Äußerungen der Liebenden eine flüchtige, schwer zu bestimmende Variation über die Liebesmusik des I. Akts. Selbst die Anordnung der Eröffnungstakte für Blechbläser ist einer anderen Eröffnungssequenz verwandt: der des III. Akts, wo die parallelen Akkorde keine mittlere Note haben, die ihnen Wärme verleihen könnte, sondern hohl und kalt zurückbleiben wie das schneeverhangene Morgengrauen an einem Tag, an dem die Angst einen immer tieferen Schatten wirft und die Hoffnungen schwinden.

Das ganze Gefüge der Oper ist von Kontrasten durchzogen, die den Stempel des bekannten Spruchs aus Henri Murgers *Scènes de la vie de bohème* tragen, von dem sich Puccini und seine Librettisten inspirieren ließen: "Vita gaia e terribile" – ein lustiges, aber entsetzliches Leben. Das griff auch der Kritiker der *Times* auf und brachte ein weiteres Zitat von Murger. Die "Bohemiens", sagt er, seien zu Extremen neigende Menschen, sowohl stoisch als auch verschwenderisch, und paßten sich den wechselhaften Winden des Schicksals an:

> Regen oder Staub, Kälte oder Hitze; nichts hält diese kühnen Abenteurer auf. Wenn sie von Not getrieben, genügsam wie die Einsiedler; fällt ihnen jedoch ein kleines Vermögen in die Hände, sieht man sie den verderblichsten Neigungen frönen.

Die schlichten, geradlinigen Unterteilungen des I. und IV. Akts entsprechen dieser Kontrastvorgabe. Der maskuline Klamauk und Unfug der ersten Hälfte hebt sich vom romantisch lyrischen Charakter der zweiten ab, und die ist mit einem weiteren Kontrast verbunden, hingerissen vor Glück der I., der IV. leidenschaftlich in seiner Tragik. Die Gewichtungen des III. Akts sind subtiler. Hier sind die Kontraste ins Material eingearbeitet, angefangen mit der Beschwörung innerer Wärme und Fröhlichkeit durch die Stimmen und den Fetzen von Musettas Lied, die aus dem Gasthaus herüberdringen, im Gegensatz zur draußen herrschenden Kälte und der kummervollen Gestalt der verzweifelten Mimì. Der Akt gipfelt im Quartett, das die unterschiedlichen Modi der ganzen Oper wiedergibt, wenn sich die langen, traurigen Phrasen Mimìs und Rodolfos mit den hauptsächlich komischen deklamatorischen Rufen Musettas und Marcellos vereinen. Hin und wieder kommt es in Form des vier Noten langen Motivs, das die Oper (und den IV. Akt) mit soviel Schwung in Gang bringt, zu einer tristen Erinnerung an die Mansarde. Wenn Mimì und Rodolfo dann langsam von der Bühne abgehen und ihre Musik allmählich verebbt, denken wir, daß der Akt so enden wird – doch dann spielt das Orchester ein unverhofftes *Fortissimo*, laut, gellend und endgültig wie das Zuschlagen einer Tür.

Daran ist einerseits der Künstler Puccini schuld, der seine Szene mit einem Verweis auf den Anfang abrundet (die beiden Unisono-Noten "ta-tum" haben runde fünfundzwanzig Minuten zuvor den Vorhang aufgehen lassen). Andererseits ist es bezeichnend. Vor dem Überraschungsschlag des *Fortissimo* hat das Publikum fast immer zu klatschen angefangen, in dem Glauben, der Akt sei zu Ende, im Begriff, mit der traurig süßen Musik der Liebenden zu verklingen. In dieser Hinsicht versinnbildlicht es die Kritiker Puccinis, die ihr Urteil fällen, ohne ihn ausreden zu lassen. Und indem sie jenes andere Element in der Zusammenstellung der Kontraste übersehen, versäumen sie viel von dem, was *La bohème* seinem Wesen nach ist. Murgers Begriffe, wir erinnern uns, lauteten "lustig, aber entsetzlich". Setzen wir Mimì mit der *Bohème* gleich, könnten wir darauf kommen, daß Puccini sie zu "lieb, aber traurig" verwässert habe. Tatsächlich stecken die Lustigkeit und das "Entsetzen" (bzw. das "Entsetzliche") auch im Herzen der Oper. Vom Aufbau her ist Lustigkeit für nahezu die Hälfte verantwortlich. Das "Entsetzliche" ist zeitweilig

außer Kraft gesetzt. Wir wissen, daß die Bohemiens oft hungern und manchmal todunglücklich sind, daß Mimì gebrechlich ist, hustet und möglicherweise sterben muß. Aber das Entsetzen schlägt dennoch ein. Ich glaube nicht, daß jemand, und sei er noch so gebildet und mit dem Werk vertraut, sich dem Schock jenes trostlosen Mollakkords entziehen kann, der den Rufen des armen Rodolfo nach Mimì vorausgeht. Die Violinen klagen nun unverhohlen, und die kleine Gruppe gebeugter Menschen auf der Bühne, die einander in ihrem Kummer trösten, wird in diesem einen Augenblick zum Inbegriff leidgeprüfter Menschheit.

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Inhaltsangabe

I. Akt
Am Weihnachtsabend in einer Mansarde im Pariser Quartier Latin versuchen Rodolfo und Marcello zu arbeiten, doch es ist ihnen beiden bitter kalt. Rodolfo beschließt, das Manuskript zu verbrennen, an dem er gearbeitet hat, um für ein wenig Wärme zu sorgen. Ihr Freund Colline trifft ein, und gleich darauf bringen zwei Knaben Speisen, Getränke und Feuerholz. Ihnen folgt Schaunard, der die Vorräte eingekauft und noch etwas Geld übrig hat. Er schlägt vor, da Weihnachten ist, zum Essen auszugehen. Als sie sich zum Gehen anschicken, erscheint der Hausherr, um die Miete einzutreiben. Sie schaffen es, die fällige Zahlung zu umgehen, und brechen auf. Nur Rodolfo bleibt zurück, um einen Artikel fertigzuschreiben.

Da klopft es an der Tür. Rodolfos Nachbarin Mimì ist vorbeigekommen, um Licht für ihre Kerze zu erbitten. Als sie eingetreten ist, erleidet sie einen Schwindelanfall und läßt sowohl die Kerze als auch den Schlüssel zu ihrem Zimmer fallen. Nachdem sie sich wieder erholt hat, suchen beide nach dem Schlüssel. Rodolfo findet ihn, steckt ihn jedoch in seine Tasche und gibt vor, die Suche fortzusetzen. Es dauert nicht lange, bis sich ihre Hände berühren. Er erzählt Mimì von sich, und sie tut es ihm nach. Rodolfos Freunde rufen von unten nach ihm, worauf er antwortet, daß er sich mit ihnen im Café Momus treffen und Mimì mitbringen werde.

II. Akt
Die Bohemiens schlendern über den Markt vor dem Café Momus. Unterwegs zum Café machen Mimì und Rodolfo halt, und er kauft Mimì ein rosa Häubchen. Im Weitergehen wird Mimì mit Rodolfos Freunden

bekanntgemacht. Alle fünf nehmen zusammen Platz und bestellen Essen und Wein. Marcello braust auf, als er Musetta, eine alte Flamme, am Arm eines greisen, wohlhabenden Verehrers namens Alcindoro vorbeiflanieren sieht. Musetta sucht einen Tisch aus und bestellt ein verschwenderisches Mahl. Marcello und Musetta tun so, als sei ihnen die Gegenwart des jeweils anderen gleichgültig. Doch nach einer Weile schickt Musetta Alcindoro fort, um ihren drückenden Schuh weiten zu lassen, und wirft sich Marcel in die Arme.

Als die Bohemiens soweit sind, daß sie die Zeche zahlen müssen, haben sie Schaunards Geld längst ausgegeben und überlassen es Alcindoro, die Rechnung zu begleichen!

III. Akt
Am Stadttor, der Barrière d'Enfer, durchsuchen früh an einem kalten Februarmorgen Zöllner das Volk, das zur Arbeit in die Stadt strömt. Marcello arbeitet in einem Wirtshaus, und Mimì ist erschienen, um ihn zu bitten, er möge mit Rodolfo reden, da seine Eifersucht ihre Beziehung zerstört. Marcello erklärt sich dazu bereit und schickt sie nach Hause. Rodolfo hat drinnen geschlafen, und als er aus dem Haus tritt, versteckt sich Mimì in der Nähe. Sie hört mit an, wie Rodolfo Marcello anvertraut, daß sie todkrank ist und seiner Meinung nach nur dann eine Chance zum überleben hat, wenn sie ihn und sein Leben in Armut hinter sich läßt. Mimì verrät mit einem Hustenanfall ihre Gegenwart. Mimì und Rodolfo beschließen, nicht mehr auseinanderzugehen, bis es Frühling wird. Mittlerweile beschuldigt Marcello, der wieder hineingegangen ist, Musetta der Schäkerei mit einem Fremden, und sie trennen sich voneinander.

IV. Akt
Es ist Frühling, und Rodolfo und Marcello sind wieder allein. Schaunard und Colline treffen mit magerer Verpflegung ein, und die vier Freunde geben vor, eine Festmahl mit Tanz zu veranstalten. Als sie sich gerade köstlich amüsieren, kommt Musetta mit der Nachricht hereingestürmt, daß Mimì druntenstehe, zu schwach, die Treppe hochzusteigen. Rodolfo eilt ihr zu Hilfe, und die anderen bereiten ein Lager für sie vor. Während sich Rodolfo um Mimì kümmert, erklärt Musetta ihm, daß Mimì den Wunsch geäußert habe, in die Mansarde zurückzukehren, in der sie mit ihm so glücklich war. Musetta, Colline und Schaunard lassen Mimì und Rodolfo allein, und die zwei denken zurück an die Liebe, die sie füreinander empfunden haben, und daran, wie sie sich zum ersten Mal begegnet sind. Die

Freunde kommen einer nach dem anderen wieder, doch es ist zu spät. Mimì ist tot.

Übersetzung: Anne Steeb/Bernd Müller

Alan Opie wurde in der englischen Grafschaft Cornwall geboren und an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama sowie am London Opera Centre ausgebildet. Seine Karriere begann bei der English National Opera (damals noch: Sadler's Wells), wo er noch vor Abschluß seines Studiums als Baritonsolist beschäftigt wurde. Zu den Partien, die er gesungen hat, zählen die Titelrollen im *Barbier von Sevilla* und im *Doktor Faust* von Busoni, Germont (*La traviata*), Eisenstein und Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Sancho Panza (*Don Quixote*) und Taddeo (*Die Italienerin in Algier*).

Er hat seine Arbeit an der English National Opera mit Auftritten für die den anderen führenden Operntruppen Großbritanniens verbunden (z.B. in *Luisa Miller* für die Opera North), und seine internationale Karriere hat ihn sowohl nach Bayreuth geführt (als Beckmesser) als auch an die Opernhäuser von Chicago, Santa Fé, Paris, Amsterdam, Wien, Brüssel und Berlin. Unter seinen vielen Aufnahmen auf Tonträger befindet sich der mit einem *Grammy* ausgezeichnete *Peter Grimes* (für Chandos), *Gloriana*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, die Titelrolle von Dallapiccolas *Ulisse* sowie *Der Barbier von Sevilla* und *Pagliacci* (für Chandos und die Peter Moores Foundation).

Dennis O'Neill, geboren in Wales als Sohn irischer und walisischer Eltern, ist einer der führenden Tenöre der Welt und obendrein Verdi-Spezialist. Er blickt auf eine lange Zusammenarbeit mit dem Royal Opera House Covent Garden zurück, wo er unter anderem Rodolfo (*La bohème*) gesungen hat, den Herzog (*Rigoletto*), Pinkerton, Edgar (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Macduff (*Macbeth*), Gustave (*Un ballo in maschera*), Foresto (*Attila*), Otello, Don Carlos, Radames (*Aida*) und Jacopo (*I due Foscari*). Darüber hinaus hat er in den USA an der Metropolitan Opera und an der Chicago Lyric Opera gastiert und zahlreiche Konzertdarbietungen gegeben.

Sein Debüt an der Bayerischen Staatsoper in München, wo er häufig zu Gast ist, erfolgte in *Un ballo in maschera*, gefolgt von einer Neuinszenierung von *Il trovatore* mit Giuseppe Sinopoli und Auftritte im *Rosenkavalier*, in *Tosca*, *Simone Boccanegra* und *Aida*. Dennis O'Neill ist außerdem ein vielbeschäftigter Konzertsänger und ist in ganz Europa mit Dirigenten wie Riccardo Muti, Sir Colin Davis und Sir Simon Rattle aufgetreten. Zu seinen

Aufnahmen auf Tonträger zählen *Tosca* und *Cavalleria rusticana* (beide für Chandos und die Peter Moores Foundation), *Der Rosenkavalier* unter der Leitung von Sir Georg Solti, *Die Fledermaus*, Macbeth und *La fanciulla del West*.

Alastair Miles, international anerkannt als einer der führenden Sänger Großbritanniens, hat überall auf der Welt an Opernhäusern gesungen, einschließlich der Metropolitan Opera, der Opéra National de Paris, der Opéra-Bastille, der Wiener Staatsoper, der San Francisco Opera, der Nederlandse Opera und dem Royal Opera House Covent Garden. Zu seinem Repertoire gehören Giorgio (*I Puritani*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Basilio, Figaro, die Titelrolle von *Oberto*, Fiesco (*Simone Boccanegra*) und Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*).

Seine höchst erfolgreiche Konzertkarriere führt ihn rund um die Welt zu Auftritten mit Dirigenten wie Carlo Maria Giulini, Zubin Mehta, Kurt Masur und John Eliot Gardiner. Seine zahlreichen Aufnahmen auf Tonträger umfassen Mendelssohns *Elias*, Verdis Requiem und Händels *Saul* und *Agrippina* sowie *Medea in Corinto*, *Orazi e Curiazi*, *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* und *Maria regina d'Inghilterra* (alle für Opera Rara).

William Dazeley ist Absolvent des Jesus College in Cambridge und hat an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama Gesang studiert. Unter seinen Auszeichnungen sind der Decca–Kathleen-Ferrier-Preis zu nennen, der Richard-Tauber-Preis und der internationale Liederpreis Walther Gruner. Sein umfangreiches Opernrepertoire schließt die Titelrollen von *Don Giovanni*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Billy Budd* und *Eugen Onegin* ein, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Pelléas, Mowgli (Michael Berkeleys *Baa Baa Black Sheep*), Danilo (*Die lustige Witwe*) sowie den Grafen und Rudolph (*Der ferne Klang*). Er ist an der Royal Opera, der Opera North und der Glyndebourne Touring Opera aufgetreten, am Teatro Regio in Turin, an der Opéra de Lyon und der New Israeli Opera. Er hat unter anderem *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, Brittens *The Rescue of Penelope* und Busonis *Faust* auf Tonträger aufgezeichnet.

Andrew Shore ist heute als der herausragende Buffobariton Großbritanniens anerkannt. Seit seinem Debüt an der English National Opera im Jahre 1988 hat er unter anderem Falstaff, Dieg (in Philip Glass' *The Making of the Representative of Planet 8*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Monsieur Calcul (*La belle Vivette*), Don Pasquale und Gianni Schicchi.

Außerdem hat er an der Kent Opera, der Opera North, der Welsh National Opera, der New Israeli Opera und der Glyndebourne Festival Opera gesungen, in Lyon, Montpelier, Barcelona und Hamburg. Zu seinen Aufzeichnungen auf Tonträger gehören *Der Barbier von Sevilla* und *Tosca* (für Chandos und die Peter Moores Foundation) und *Die Sache Makropulos*.

Cynthia Haymon wurde in Jacksonville in Florida geboren. Seit ihrem Debüt 1985 bei der Welturaufführung von Thea Musgraves *Harriet, a Woman called Moses* an der Virginia Opera ist sie in Covent Garden aufgetreten (Bess und Mimì), in Glyndebourne, Hamburg, München und an vielen anderen angesehenen Opernhäusern. Ihr europäisches Debüt erfolgte 1986 als Bess (*Porgy and Bess*) in Trevor Nunns viel bewunderter Inszenierung in Glyndebourne. Des weiteren war sie unter anderem als Liù (*Turandot*) in Hamburg und München zu sehen, als Amor (in Glucks *Orfeo*) am Théâtre royal de la Monnaie in Brüssel, als Pamina (in der *Zauberflöte*) an der Opéra-Bastille, als Micaëla (*Carmen*) mit dem Israel Philharmonic Orchestra und an der Seattle Opera sowie als Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), wiederum an der Seattle Opera.

Auf dem Konzertpodium ist Cynthia Haymon mit dem Israel Philharmonic Orchestra unter Kurt Masur aufgetreten, mit dem London Symphony Orchestra unter Myung-Whun Chung und Michael Tilson Thomas, mit dem Cleveland Orchestra und dem Boston Symphony Orchestra. Ihre Diskrographie umfaßt Tippetts *A Child of Our Time* (für Chandos), eine Soloaufnahme unter dem Titel "Where the Music Comes From – American Songs", und *Porgy and Bess*.

Mark Milhofer hat an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama Gesang studiert und war ein Schüler von Neil Mackie und Bernard Dickerson. 1992 wurde er Ensemblemitglied der Glyndebourne Festival Opera und trat in *Così fan tutte* und *Death in Venice* auf. Er hat die Titelrolle von *Idomeneo* und Lenski (*Eugen Onegin*) am Oxford Playhouse gesungen, Don Ramiro (*La cenerentola*) am Teatro Regio in Parma, Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*) mit der European Chamber Opera und ist in *Dido and Aeneas* und *Curlew River* mit der Opera Factory, in *The Indian Queen* und in Konzerten mit dem King's Consort in ganz Europa aufgetreten.

Marie McLaughlin hat sich als eine der weltweit führenden Opernsopranistinnen durchgesetzt. Zu ihren internationalen

Erfolgen zählen die Susanna bei den Salzburger Festspielen, an der Metropolitan Opera und am Royal Opera house, Zerlina, Susanna und Ilia an der Wiener Staatsoper, Donna Elvira und Violetta in Glyndebourne and Susanna in Genf. Davon abgesehen gastiert sie regelmäßig in Hamburg, Berlin und München und hat an der English National Opera, an der Oper der Stadt Köln, am Opernhaus von Lausanne und an der Los Angeles Opera gesungen.

Marie McLaughlin ist im Konzert mit einigen der bedeutedsten Dirigenten der Welt aufgetreten, darunter Leonard Bernstein, Bernard Haitink und Giuseppe Sinopoli, und zu ihren Aufnahmen auf Tonträger zählen Zerlina (*Don Giovanni* unter Sir Neville Marriner), Despina (*Così fan tutte* unter James Levine) und Alben mit Liedern von Schubert und Strauss. Außerdem war sie an Video-aufzeichnungen von *Rigoletto*, *La traviata* und *Carmen* beteiligt.

Geoffrey Mitchell hat im Lauf seiner Gesangskarriere ein erstaunlich umfangreiches Repertoire erschlossen, von alter bis hin zu zeitgenössischer Musik. Daraus ergaben sich erst Dirigieraufträge von der BBC, dann eine ausgedehntere Zusammenarbeit mit seinen Sängern, die wiederum zur Gründung des **Geoffrey Mitchell Choir** führte. Frühe Schallplattenaufnahmen hatten zur Folge, daß der Chor langfristige Beziehungen zu Opera Rara einging, für die er 15 Opern aufgezeichnet hat. Derzeit genießt er dank weiterer Verpflichtungen für die BBC und internationale Schallplattenfirmen wachsendes Ansehen.

Der Kinderchor **Peter Kay Children's Choir** bietet jungen Sängern Gelegenheit, in Opern und Konzerten aufzutreten, in Werbespots (TV und Radio), bei Wohltätigkeits-veranstaltungen, auf Festivals und in Bühnenproduktion in Großbritannien, Frankreich, Belgien, den Niederlanden, Deutschland, Spanien und den USA. Neue Mitglieder werden auf Einladung und durch Vorsingen gewonnen, deren Teilnehmer bereits Erfahrungen mit Gesangsauftritten gemacht haben, und zwar an der English National Opera, wo Peter Kay als Children's Adviser – Kinderberater – tätig ist, in der Finchley Children's Music Group, im New London Children's Choir, bei den Jennifer Lilleystone Singers und an Schulen überall in London und im Süden Englands.

Mit der Gründung des **Philharmonia Orchestra** verwirklichte Walter Legge sein hohes Ziel, ein handverlesenes Orchester der Spitzenklasse aufzustellen. Das Philharmonia

Orchestra gab sein erstes Konzert unter Sir Thomas Beecham im Oktober 1945 und war bald als eines der wahrhaft großen Orchester der Welt angesehen. Viele bekannte Dirigenten haben mit ihm zusammengearbeitet, und es ist und bleibt das meistaufgezeichnete Orchester der Welt. Seine Diskographie, darunter auch Opern für die Peter Moores Foundation/ Opera Rara, beläuft sich auf über tausend Aufnahmen. Der Rang des Philharmonia Orchestra als "das führende Orchester Londons" ist auf seine Vitalität zurückzuführen, seinen einmalig warmen Klang und sein Engagement für die Vergabe von Kompositionsaufträgen und die Aufführung der Musik bedeutender Gegenwartskomponisten wie dem verstorbenen Witold Lutoslawski, Sir Harrison Birtwistle und James MacMillan, dem Gastkomponisten des Orchesters.

David Parry studierte bei Sergiu Celibidache und begann seine Laufbahn als Sir John Pritchards musikalischer Assistent. Er debütierte mit dem English Music Theatre und wurde Kapellmeister an den Städtischen Bühnen Dortmund sowie an Opera North in Leeds. Von 1983 bis 1987 fungierte er als Musikdirektor für Opera 80 und seit 1992 ist er der Musikdirektor (und Gründer) des zeitgenössischen Opern-Festivals Almeida Opera.

Parrys Tätigkeitsbereich ist nicht nur das Opernhaus, sondern auch der Konzertsaal. Sein Repertoire erstreckt sich von Mozart und der italienischen Oper des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts bis zu Janáček, Britten und zeitgenössischer Musik. In England dirigiert er regelmäßig an der English National Opera und konzertiert mit dem Philharmonia Orchestra, 1996 machte er mit *Così fan tutte* sein Debüt bei dem Glyndebourne Festival.

David Parry gastiert häufig in Spanien, wo er bereits mit den meisten Opernkompanien und Sinfonieorchestern aufgetreten ist. Die spanische Premiere von *Peter Grimes* fand unter seiner Leitung in Madrid statt; 1996 dirigierte er die erste spanische Inszenierung von *The Rake's Progress* (Strawinsky) und weihte zwei neue Konzertsäle mit der Neunten Sinfonie von Beethoven sowie ein neues Opernhaus mit *Carmen* ein. In Italien leitete er *Ricciardo e Zoraide* bei dem Rossini-Festival in Pesaro. Er tritt in Frankreich, Deutschland, Belgien, den Niederlanden und Schweden auf, wo er eine gefeierte Inszenierung von Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* dirigierte.

Außerhalb Europas ist David Parry bei dem Hongkong International Festival und mit dem UNAM Symphony Orchestra in Mexico City

aufgetreten, war mit *Carmen* in Japan auf Tournee und leitete eine Neuinszenierung von *Katja Kabanova* für das Festival in Neuseeland.

Parry hat zahlreiche Werke für das Label Opera Rara eingespielt, zuletzt *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* von Donizetti, das in Belgien mit dem Prix Cecilia ausgezeichnet wurde; für Chandos hat er *Cavalleria rusticana*, eine preisgekrönte *Tosca,* und eine Aufnahme operatischen Arien aufgenommen.

Giacomo Puccini: La bohème

L'opéra *La bohème* conserve son titre en français même quand on le chante en anglais. Dans son compte-rendu de la création anglaise, le critique du *Times* attira l'attention sur le fait qu'une traduction littérale eut induit en erreur, car il ne s'agissait pas vraiment d'un opéra traitant de la Bohème. La partition vocale anglaise était intitulée *The Bohemians*, et d'après ce critique, ce titre convenait mieux. S'il fit ce genre de remarques, c'est sans aucun doute parce que la représentation fut donnée par la Carl Rosa Company au Theatre Royal de Manchester, et non pas sur la scène internationale du Covent Garden de Londres, et que l'œuvre fut chantée en anglais. Il ne trouva pas à redire à cela, mais il estima néanmoins que la traduction aurait pu être meilleure.

Quels que soient les défauts du texte utilisé lors de cette première représentation, le public de Manchester fut enthousiasmé, et la soirée du 22 avril 1897 fit date dans l'Histoire. Le *jour suivant*, les Londonniens pouvaient lire les échos d'un succès retentissant. En effet, Puccini avait "traité son sujet avec la délicatesse, la légèreté, la puissance et la force d'un maître", et "la représentation fut à presque tous les points de vue un véritable triomphe pour tous ceux qui y participèrent". Le compositeur, qui depuis son arrivée à Londres avait été très découragé, retrouva le moral. L'éditeur Tito Ricordi qui l'accompagnait (il était paraît-il capable de chanter tous les rôles de l'opéra) jubilait de voir que son idée de donner la première en dehors de la capitale avait aussi bien réussi. Et il avait probablement raison. En effet, quand l'œuvre fut donnée à Covent Garden, elle ne suscita qu'un intérêt médiocre, tandis que la presse la condamna, jugeant qu'elle était "insuffisamment stimulante pour être réentendue souvent".

Son succès londonnien ultérieur fut attribué au talent de Nellie Melba et à la beauté de son chant dans le rôle de Mimì. Cette explication semble tout à fait justifiée, en particulier si l'on considère que le public chic de Covent Garden n'était sans doute pas très enclin à s'enthousiasmer pour un opéra dont l'action se situe dans une mansarde. Cependant, l'œuvre aurait probablement fini par s'imposer en raison de son charme intrinsèque, ainsi qu'elle le fit dans le monde entier. Certains ont parfois voulu expliquer sa popularité dans le fait que les

"gens ordinaires" pouvaient s'indentifier avec les personnages, allant jusqu'à dire sur un ton plutôt condescendant que la petite caissière du supermarché d'à-côté pourrait se reconnaître dans Mimì. D'autres ont affirmé que les mélodies et les sentiments sont suffisants à expliquer le charme persistant de l'opéra tout comme à discréditer ses qualités réelles et son effet plus profond. Il est intéressant de noter qu'en Angleterre, où le public de la première fut si totalement conquis par l'opéra, un dédain pour l'œuvre de Puccini allait persister pendant très longtemps parmi de nombreux musiciens et mélomanes. Aussi tardivement que 1944, et alors qu'il chantait le rôle de Rodolphe dans une nouvelle production vivante et sans mièvrerie donnée au Sadler's Wells, Peter Pears pouvait écrire à Benjamin Britten: "C'est de la musique dégoûtante".

Si cette situation a changé, c'est en partie à cause d'une compréhension croissante et régulière de la partition comme constituant un ensemble composé, dont les éléments sont réunis avec une habileté qui invite à l'analyse et fait de l'œuvre quelque chose de complètement différent de la "comédie larmoyante" que ses détracteurs ont voulu voir en elle. Des ouvrages tels que la biographie critique de Mosco Carner (parue en 1958), ou celui, plus court mais tout ausssi suggestif, d'Edward Greenfield (*Puccini: Keeper of the Seal*, 1958) mirent en lumière le travail de ce compositeur émotif, et l'effet ne fut pas celui d'une dichotomie dans laquelle des processus cérébraux et intuitifs demeurent séparés et distincts, mais plutôt celui d'une symbiose entre l'intellectuel et l'affectif se développant en un tout. Au fil des années, cette manière d'"apprendre" *La bohème* a été un enrichissement régulier. La structure de chacun de ses actes, les relations qu'ils entretiennent, les rapports entre les motifs, tout s'éclaire peu à peu, comme c'est généralement le cas pour toute grande œuvre d'art. Curieusement, ce processus est comparable à celui qui consiste à "apprendre" un poème comme "La terre vaine" (The Waste Land) de T.S. Eliot: des bribes s'inscrivent dans la mémoire comme les fragments d'une mélodie, et peu à peu, ils se relient, tandis que leur signification se clarifie au fur et à mesure qu'elle s'approfondit.

Prenons l'Acte II à titre d'exemple. C'est un petit chef-d'œuvre en soi, avec sa profusion d'idées mélodiques (huit d'entre-elles viennent tout de suite à l'esprit), la variété de ses textures (passages avec solo et chœur, ensemble de voix solistes, une voix d'enfant, une voix hors scène, une fanfare militaire hors scène, tous les effectifs combinés ensemble), la diversité de ses "langages" (la tendresse des amants, l'excitation

de la foule de la veille de Noël, les colères et les remontrances, le charme joyeux ou le rajeunissement extatique). Mais tous ces éléments, ainsi que la merveilleuse marqueterie de ces nombreuses parties, demeurent en un sens secondaires par rapport à l'efficacité de l'Acte dans sa position à l'intérieur de l'œuvre dans sa totalité. Il est comme le scherzo d'une symphonie, un brillant *allegro* en majeur; c'est également une affirmation, au sein d'un contexte qui se révèlera tragique, de la comédie humaine, dans laquelle on voit des individus mis en perspective comme partie du grand tout. Plus encore, presque toute sa musique est "organique", et entretient des rapports très étroits avec les autres actes, plus longs et plus graves. Ainsi, les phrases des amants opèrent une variation délicatement insaisissable de la musique d'amour de l'Acte I. De même, le schéma des mesures d'introduction confiées aux cuivres est relié à une autre ouverture, celle de l'Acte III, où les accords en quintes parallèles se voient privés des tierces qui leur donnent chaleur, et sont laissés creux et glaciaux tandis que l'aube neigeuse se lève sur un jour chargé de craintes et d'ombres grandissantes, et que l'espoir s'évanouit.

Toute la trame de l'opéra est parsemée de contrastes, et porte l'empreinte de la fameuse phrase du roman *Scènes de la vie de bohème* de Henri Murger, "vie charmante et (…) terrible", qui servit de base à l'inspiration de Puccini et de ses deux librettistes. Le critique du *Times* la reprit également, et cita d'autres extraits du roman de Murger. Ces "bohémiens", dit-il, sont des individus extrêmistes, à la fois stoïques et dépensiers, s'adaptant aux revers de fortune:

> Pluie ou poussière, froid ou chaud; rien ne saurait arrêter ces aventuriers plein d'audace. Quand le besoin les harcèle, ils se font stoïques à la manière des anachorètes; mais qu'un peu d'argent leur tombe dans les mains, et les voilà qui se jettent dans les caprices les plus ruineux.

Les divisions bien nettes au milieu du premier et du quatrième acte reflètent ce schéma tout en contrastes. Le caractère masculin du jeu loufoque et rustre de la première partie s'oppose au lyrisme romantique de la seconde, et implique un contraste supplémentaire, à savoir celui qui existe entre le premier acte, extatique dans son bonheur, et le quatrième, passionné dans son tragique. L'équilibre du troisième acte est plus subtil. Dans celui-ci, les contrastes s'appliquent au matériau, en commençant par l'évocation de la gaité et de la chaleur intérieures avec les voix et les bribes de la chanson de Musetta provenant de la taverne s'opposant avec la froidure du dehors et l'image pitoyable de Mimì brisée. L'acte culmine avec le quatuor, qui représente les humeurs

contrastées de tout l'opéra, tandis que les longues et tristes phrases de Mimì et de Rodolphe se mèlent avec la querelle essentiellement comique de Musetta et de Marcel. De temps en temps revient le triste rappel de la mansarde, avec son motif de quatre notes qui lance l'opéra (et l'Acte IV) de manière si vigoureuse. Et tandis que Mimì et Rodolphe quittent lentement la scène, leur musique se dissipant peu à peu, nous croyons que c'est de cette manière que l'acte va se terminer – mais brusquement, un *fortissimo* violent, bref et définitif éclate dans l'orchestre, tel le claquement d'une porte.

C'est en partie Puccini l'artiste, achevant sa scène par une référence à son début (ces deux notes jouées à l'unisson qui accompagnèrent le lever du rideau quelque vingt-cinq minutes plus tôt). Mais ce détail est également typique. Avant le coup *fortissimo*, le public aura presque toujours commencé à applaudir, croyant que l'acte est terminé, se concluant avec la musique douce-amère des amants. En réagissant ainsi, il représente les critiques qui jugent Puccini avant d'avoir fini de l'écouter jusqu'au bout. Et en ignorant l'autre élément dans la composition des contrastes, ils passent à côté de ce qu'est fondamentalement *La bohème*. Comme nous l'avons déjà dit, les mots de Murger sont: "vie charmante et terrible". Si on réduit *La bohème* au personnage de Mimì, on pourait penser que Puccini dilua ceci en quelque chose de "tendre et triste". En fait, la gaité et la "terreur" (ou le "terrible") se trouvent également au centre de l'opéra. Du point de vue structurel, la gaité compte pour presque la moitié. Le "terrible" reste en suspens. Nous savons que les Bohèmes sont souvent affamés et qu'ils ont parfois le cœur brisé, que Mimì est frêle, qu'elle tousse et qu'elle risque de mourir. Mais la terreur frappe en effet. Je ne puis croire que quiconque, aussi raffiné et aussi familier avec l'œuvre soit-il, ne puisse ressentir le choc de ce sinistre accord en mineur qui éclate avant le cri de Rodolphe "Mimì". Les violons se lamentent maintenant sans retenue, et le petit groupe d'individus affligés réunis sur scène, se réconfortant l'un l'autre dans leur chagrin, devient à ce moment-là l'image même de l'humanité accablée.

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Argument

Acte I

C'est la veille de Noël dans une mansarde du Quartier latin. Rodolphe et Marcel essayent de travailler, mais ils sont tous les deux transis par le froid. Rodolphe décide de brûler le

manuscrit auquel il est en train de travailler pour faire un peu de chauffage. Leur ami Colline arrive. Il est bientôt suivi de deux garçons qui apportent de quoi manger, du vin et du combustible. Entre ensuite Shaunard qui a acheté les provisions et a encore un peu d'argent. Il suggère que puisque c'est la veille de Noël, ils devraient aller dîner en ville. Au moment de partir, le propriétaire arrive pour chercher son loyer. Ils parviennent à ne pas le payer et s'en vont, laissant Rodolphe qui doit finir d'écrire un article.

Quelqu'un frappe à la porte. C'est Mimì, sa voisine, qui vient lui demander du feu pour sa chandelle. Elle s'évanouit presque, et laisse tomber sa bougie et la clé de sa chambre. Quand elle se sent mieux, ils se mettent à chercher la clé. Rodolphe la trouve et la glisse dans sa poche, puis il fait semblant de continuer à la chercher. Bientôt leurs mains se rencontrent. Rodolphe se met à parler de lui, et elle fait de même. Les amis de Rodolphe l'appellent d'en-bas, mais il leur dit qu'il les rejoindra au Café Momus, et qu'il viendra accompagné de Mimì.

Acte II

Les bohèmes déambulent dans la rue marchande devant le Café Momus. Mimì et Rodolphe s'arrêtent en chemin. Rodolphe lui achète un bonnet rose. Ils continuent, et Mimì est présentée aux amis de Rodolphe. Les cinq amis s'installent à une table et commandent le menu et du vin. Marcel perd son sang-froid quand il aperçoit Musetta, une de ses anciennes conquêtes, au bras d'un vieux et riche admirateur, Alcindoro. Musetta s'installe à une table et se conduit de manière extravagante. Marcel et Musetta font semblant de s'ignorer, mais n'en pouvant plus, Musetta finit par envoyer Alcindoro faire réparer ses souliers qui lui blessent les pieds, et elle se jette dans les bras de Marcel.

Quand l'addition arrive, les bohèmes réalisent qu'ils ont déjà dépensé tout l'argent de Schaunard, aussi décident-ils de la laisser sur le compte d'Alcindoro!

Acte III

Un matin glacial de février. A la Barrière d'Enfer, l'une des portes de la ville, les officiers de douane fouillent les ouvriers avant de les laisser entrer dans Paris. Marcel travaille dans une taverne. Mimì vient lui demander de parler à Rodolphe, car sa jalousie est en train de ruiner leur amour. Marcel accepte et lui dit de rentrer chez elle. Mais Rodolphe dormait dans la taverne, et quand il fait son apparition, Mimì se cache. Elle entend Rodophe dire à Marcel qu'elle est gravement malade, et qu'il

croit que sa seule chance de survivre est de le quitter, lui et son existence misérable. Prise d'une crise de toux, Mimì révèle sa présence. Mimì et Rodolphe décident d'attendre le printemps avant de se séparer. Pendant ce temps, Marcel, qui est rentré de nouveau dans la taverne, accuse Musetta de flirter avec un étranger, et ils mettent un terme à leur liaison.

Acte IV

C'est le printemps. Rodolphe et Marcel sont à nouveau seuls. Schaunard et Colline entrent et apportent quelques maigres victuailles. Les quatres amis font comme s'ils faisaient un festin avec accompagnement de danses. Tandis qu'ils se réjouissent, Musetta entre brusquement et leur dit que Mimì est en bas, mais qu'elle est trop faible pour monter l'escalier. Rodolphe se précipite pour l'aider, tandis que les autres lui préparent un lit. Pendant que Rodolphe prend soin de Mimì, Musetta lui explique que Mimì voulait revenir dans la mansarde où elle avait été si heureuse auprès de lui. Musetta, Colline et Schaunard laissent seuls Mimì et Rodolphe. Ils se souviennent alors de l'amour qu'ils ont partagé et des circonstances de leur première rencontre. Les amis reviennent l'un après l'autre, mais il est trop tard. Mimì est morte.

Traduction: Francis Marchal

Né en Cornouailles, **Alan Opie** a fait ses études à la Guildhall School of Music and Drama de Londres et au London Opera Centre. Il commença sa carrière avec l'English National Opera (alors Sadler's Wells) où il fut nommé bariton principal alors qu'il était encore étudiant. Il y a chanté les rôles titres du *Barbier de Séville* et du *Dr Faust* de Busoni, et ceux de Germont (*La traviata*), Eisenstein et Falke (*La Chauve-Souris*), Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), Papageno (*La flûte enchantée*), Sancho Pancha (*Don Quichotte*) et Taddeo (*L'Italienne à Alger*).

Parallèlement à ses activités avec l'English National Opera, il s'est produit avec d'autres grandes compagnies britanniques (notamment dans *Luisa Miller* avec l'Opera North). Sur le plan international, il fut invité à chanter à Bayreuth (Beckmesser), et aux opéras de Chicago, Santa Fé, Paris, Amsterdam, Vienne, Bruxelles et Berlin. Ses nombreux enregistrements incluent *Peter Grimes* (pour Chandos) qui a reçu un *Grammy Award*, *Gloriana*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, le rôle titre de *Ulisse* de Dallapiccola, *Le barbier de Séville* et *Pagliacci* (réalisé par Chandos et la Peter Moores Foundation).

Né au Pays de Galles de parents gallois et irlandais, **Dennis O'Neill** est l'un des plus grands ténors de notre temps, et un éminent

spécialiste des œuvres de Verdi. Il a longtemps travaillé avec la Royal Opera House de Covent Garden où il a chanté les rôles de Rodolfo (*La bohème*), le Duc (*Rigoletto*), Pinkerton, Edgar (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Macduff (*Macbeth*), Gustave (*Un ballo in maschera*), Foresto (*Attila*), Otello, Don Carlos, Radames (*Aida*) et Jacopo (*I due Foscari*). Aux Etats-Unis, il s'est produit au Metropolitan Opera de New York et au Lyric Opera de Chicago, et a donné de nombreux concerts.

Régulièrement invité par le Bayerische Staatsoper de Munich, ses débuts dans *Un ballo in maschera* furent suivis d'une nouvelle production de *Il trovatore* sous la direction de Giuseppe Sinopoli. Il y a également chanté dans *Le chevalier à la rose*, *Tosca*, *Simon Boccanegra* et *Aida*. Dennis O'Neill donne de nombreux concerts, et s'est produit à travers toute l'Europe sous la direction de chefs tels que Riccardo Muti, Colin Davis et Simon Rattle. Ses enregistrements comprennent *Tosca* et *Cavalleria rusticana* (tous deux réalisés par Chandos et la Peter Moores Foundation), *Le chevalier à la rose* sous la direction de Solti, *La chauve-souris*, *Macbeth* et *La fanciulla del West*.

Considéré comme l'un des plus grands chanteurs anglais, **Alastair Miles** s'est produit dans les salles d'opéra du monde entier, notamment au Metropolitan Opera de New York, à l'Opéra Bastille, à Vienne, San Francisco, Amsterdam et au Covent Garden de Londres dans les rôles de Giorgio (*I Puritani*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Basilio, Figaro, le rôle titre de Oberto, Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*) et Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*).

Sa très brillante carrière de concertiste le mène aux quatre coins du monde où il chante sous la direction de chefs aussi éminents que Carlo Maria Giulini, Zubin Mehta, Kurt Masur et John Eliot Gardiner. Parmi ses nombreux enregistrements, on peut relever entre autres *Elijah* de Mendelssohn, le Requiem de Verdi, *Saul* et *Agrippina* de Haendel, ainsi que *Medea in Corinto*, *Orazi e Curiazi*, *Rosamonda d'Inghilterra*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* et *Maria regina d'Inghilterra* (tous pour le label Opera Rara).

William Dazeley est diplômé du Jesus College de Cambridge, et a étudié le chant à la Guildhall School of Music and Drama de Londres. Il est lauréat du Decca–Kathleen Ferrier Prize, du Richard Tauber Prize et du Walther Gruner International Lieder Prize. Son vaste répertoire inclut les rôles titres de *Don Giovanni*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Billy Budd* et *Eugène Onéguine*, Papageno (*La flûte enchantée*), Pelléas, Mowgli (*Baa Baa Black Sheep* de Michael

Berkeley), Danilo (*La veuve joyeuse*) et le Comte et Rudolph (*Der ferne Klang*). Il s'est produit au Royal Opera de Covent Garden, à l'Opera North, avec le Glyndebourne Touring Opera, au Teatro Regio de Turin, à l'Opéra de Lyon et au New Israeli Opera. Parmi ses enregistrements figurent *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *The Rescue of Penelope* de Britten et *Dr Faust* de Busoni.

Andrew Shore est aujourd'hui considéré comme le premier bariton bouffe d'Angleterre. Depuis ses débuts à l'English National Opera de Londres en 1988 où il a chanté les rôles de Falstaff, Dieg (dans *The Making of the Representative of Planet 8* de Philip Glass), Papageno (*La flûte enchantée*), Monsieur Calcul (*La belle Vivette*), Don Pasquale et Gianni Schicchi. Il a également chanté au Kent Opera, à l'Opera North, au Welsh National Opera, au New Israeli Opera, au Glyndebourne Festival Opera, à Lyon, Montpellier, Barcelone et Hambourg. Parmi ses enregistrements, on peut noter *Le Barbier de Séville* et *Tosca* (réalisé par Chandos et la Peter Moores Foundation) et *L'affaire Makropoulos*.

Cynthia Haymon est née à Jacksonville en Floride. Depuis ses débuts en 1985 dans *Harriet, a Woman called Moses* de Thea Musgrave donné en création mondiale par le Virginia Opera, elle s'est produite à Covent Garden (Bess et Mimì), Glyndebourne, Hambourg, Munich et dans de nombreux autres salles d'opéra prestigieuses. Elle fit ses débuts européens en 1986 dans le rôle de Bess (*Porgy and Bess*) dans la production très acclamée de Trevor Nunn donnée à Glyndebourne. Elle également chanté les rôles suivants: Liù (*Turandot*) à Hambourg et Munich, Amor (*Orfeo* de Gluck) au Théâtre royal de la Monnaie de Bruxelles, Pamina (*La flûte enchantée*) à l'Opéra-Bastille, Micaela (*Carmen*) avec l'Orchestre philharmonique d'Israël et le Seattle Opera, et Suzanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), également au Seattle Opera.

Cynthia Haymon s'est produite en concert avec l'Orchestre philharmonique d'Israël sous la direction de Kurt Masur, avec le London Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Myung-Whun Chung et de Michael Tilson Thomas, avec le Cleveland Orchestra et le Boston Symphony Orchestra. Parmi ses enregistrements figurent *A Child of Our Time* de Tippett (pour Chandos), un disque de mélodies folkloriques américaines intitulé "Where the Music Comes From", et *Porgy and Bess*.

Mark Milhofer a étudié le chant à la Guildhall School of Music and Drama de Londres, et avec Neil Mackie et Bernard Dickerson. En

1992, il devint membre du Glyndebourne Festival Opera où il s'est produit dans *Così fan tutte* et *Death in Venice* de Britten. Il a chanté le rôle titre dans Idomeneo et celui de Lensky (*Eugène Onéguine*) à la Playhouse d'Oxford, Don Ramiro (*La cenerentola*) au Teatro Regio de Parme, Tamino (*La flûte enchantée*) avec l'European Chamber Opera, dans *Dido and Aeneas* et *Curlew River* (Britten) avec l'Opera Factory, dans *The Indian Queen* de Purcell et en concert à travers toute l'Europe avec le King's Consort.

Marie McLaughlin est aujourd'hui considérée comme l'une des meilleures sopranos lyriques du monde. Parmi ses succès internationaux figurent ses interprétations du rôle de Susanna au Festival de Salzbourg, au Metropolitan Opera de New York, au Covent Garden de Londres, à Genève et à l'Opéra d'Etat de Vienne, de Zerlina et d'Ilia à l'Opéra d'Etat de Vienne, de Donna Elvira et de Violetta à Glyndebourne. Elle se produit régulièrement à Hambourg, Berlin et Munich. Elle a chanté à l'English National Opera de Londres, à l'Opéra de Cologne et à ceux de Lausanne et de Los Angeles.

Marie McLaughlin s'est produite en concert avec quelques-uns des plus grand chefs, notamment Leonard Bernstein, Bernard Haitink et Giuseppe Sinopoli. Parmi ses enregistrements, on peut noter *Don Giovanni* (dans le rôle de Zerlina) sous la direction de Neville Marriner, *Così fan tutte* (dans le rôle de Despina) sous la direction de James Levine, ainsi que des disques de mélodies de Schubert et de Richard Strauss. Elle figure également dans des enregistrements vidéo de *Rigoletto*, *La traviata* et *Carmen*.

La carrière de chanteur de Geoffrey Mitchell a couvert un répertoire d'une remarquable étendue allant de la musique ancienne à la musique contemporaine. Elle prit son essor à la suite de plusieurs invitations à diriger que lui offrit la BBC, et à une collaboration plus étroite avec ses propres chanteurs. C'est ainsi qu'il fut amené à fonder le **Geoffrey Mitchell Choir** avec lequel il a enregistré quinze opéras pour Opera Rara. Jouissant d'une réputation grandissante, ils ont d'autres projets avec la BBC et des maisons de disques internationales.

Le **Peter Kay Children's Choir** offre à de jeunes chanteurs la possibilité de se produire à l'opéra, au concert, à la télévision, à la radio, lors de galas de bienfaisance, dans des festivals et des productions théâtrales en Grande-Bretagne, en France, en Belgique, aux Pays-

Bas, en Allemagne, en Espagne et aux Etats-Unis. Ses membres sont recrutés sur invitation et sur audition, attirant des participants possédant déjà une expérience de la scène, à l'English National Opera où Peter Kay est conseiller pour enfants, avec le Finchley Children's Music Group, le New London Children's Choir, les Jennifer Lilleystone Singers, et dans des écoles de Londres et du sud de l'Angleterre.

Quand il créa **Philharmonia Orchestra**, Walter Legge réalisa sa grande ambition de former un orchestre de niveau international composé de musiciens triés sur le volet. Le Philharmonia Orchestra donna son premier concert sous la direction de Thomas Beecham en octobre 1945, et s'imposa rapidement comme l'un des véritables grands orchestres du monde. De nombreux chefs d'orchestre illustres ont été étroitement associés avec cet orchestre qui demeure aujourd'hui le plus enregistré au monde. En effet, sa discographie compte plus de mille enregistrements incluant des opéras pour la Fondation Peter Moores, Opera Rara. La position de "premier orchestre de Londres" du Philharmonia Orchestra résulte de sa vitalité, de sa sonorité chaleureuse unique et de sa volonté de commander et de jouer des œuvres de compositeurs contemporains importants tels que le regretté Witold Lutoslawski, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, et le compositeur associé de l'orchestre, James MacMillan.

David Parry étudia avec Sergiu Celibidache et commença sa carrière comme assistant de Sir John Pritchard. Il fit ses débuts avec l'English Music Theatre et devint plus tard chef appointé du Städtische Bühnen Dortmund et d'Opera North. Directeur musical d'Opera 80 de 1983 à 1987, il est depuis 1992 le directeur musical fondateur du festival d'opéra contemporain Almeida Opera.

Il poursuit une carrière très active à l'opéra et dans les salles de concert. Son répertoire va de Mozart et de l'opéra italien du début du XIXe siècle à Janáček, Britten et à la musique contemporaine. En Angleterre, il a fait des apparitions régulières à l'English National Opera et lors de concerts avec le Philharmonia. En 1996, il a fait ses débuts au Festival de Glyndebourne avec *Così fan tutte.*

Il se rend fréquemment en Espagne où il s'est produit avec la plupart des troupes d'opéra et des orchestres symphoniques. Il a donné la première espagnole de *Peter Grimes* à Madrid et, en 1996, a dirigé la première mise en scène espagnole de *The Rake's Progress*. Il a aussi inauguré deux nouvelles salles de concert avec

une interprétation de la Neuvième symphonie de Beethoven et un nouvel opéra avec *Carmen*. Il s'est également produit en Italie où il a dirigé *Ricciardo e Zoraide* au Festival d'opéra de Pesaro (consacré à Rossini), mais il s'est aussi rendu en France, en Allemagne, en Belgique, en Hollande, et en Suède où il a dirigé une mise en scène très applaudie du *Midsummer Night's Dream* de Britten.

Hors d'Europe, David Parry s'est produit au Festival international de Hong Kong, a dirigé l'UNAM Symphony Orchestra à Mexico, a fait une tournée consacrée à *Carmen* au Japon, et, en 1996, a dirigé une nouvelle mise en scène de *Katya Kabanova* au Festival de Nouvelle-Zélande.

Il a réalisé un grand nombre d'enregistrements pour le label Opera Rara, le plus récent étant *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* de Donizetti, qui a remporté le prix Cecilia en Belgique, et c'est chez Chandos qu'il a dirigé *Cavalleria rusticana*, son enregistrement primé de *Tosca* et une disque d'aries operatiques avec Bruce Ford.

Giacomo Puccini: La bohème

La bohème, si noti, mantiene il titolo francese anche quando l'opera italiana è cantata in inglese. Il critico del *Times*, nella sua recensione della première britannica, osservò che una tradizione letterale avrebbe fuorviato il pubblico giacche l'opera non aveva proprio niente a che fare con la Boemia. Lo spartito inglese per canto e pianoforte era intitolato *The Bohemians* e suggerì che questo titolo, sarebbe stato più appropriato. La causa del suo ragionamento stava indubbiamente nel fatto che la rappresentazione aveva avuto luogo non davanti al pubblico internazionale del Covent Garden a Londra ma nella stagione della Carl Rosa Company al Theatre Royal di Manchester, ed era stata data in inglese. Il critico non trovo in ciò nulla da obbiettare ma osservò, peraltro, che avrebbe potuto essere data in un inglese un po' migliore.

Qualunque siano state le manchevolezze linguistiche di quella prima rappresentazione, al pubblico di Manchester essa piacque immensamente e il 22 aprile 1897 fu una serata storica. Il giorno dopo (si noti, il giorno dopo) i londinesi poterono leggere la notizia di un successo strepitoso. Puccini ha "trattato il suo soggetto con delicatezza e leggerezza, con un vigore e un polso da maestro", e "la rappresentazione è stata quasi sotto ogni aspetto un trionfo per tutti". Puccini, che era stato assai depresso al suo arrivo a Manchester, si racconsolò. L'editore, Tito Ricordi, che lo aveva accompagnato (un bello spirito, capace, a quanto pare, di cantare da solo qualsiasi parte nell'opera), era giubilante che la sua idea di dare questa prima esecuzione fuori Londra aveva funzionato tanto bene. E probabilmente aveva ragione: quando l'opera giunse al Covent Garden incontrò poco interesse e la stampa la giudicò sbrigativamente "non abbastanza stimolante per essere ascoltata spesso".

In seguito, il suo successo nella capitale è stato attribuito all'intervento di Nellie Melba e alla sua squisita interpretazione del ruolo di Mimì. Indubbiamente ciò ebbe il suo peso, particolarmente presso il pubblico mondano del Covent Garden che potrebbe non aver reagito molto entusiasticamente ad un'opera che si svolge in un abbaino. Ma l'opera avrebbe quasi sicuramente prevalso grazie al suo stesso fascino, così come fece in tutto il mondo della lirica. Un'altra ragione data talvolta per la sua

popolarità è che sarebbe possibile per la "gente comune" identificarsi con i suoi personaggi e che – come fu detto con una certa condiscendenza – qualsiasi commessa di Woolworth avrebbe potuto riconoscersi in Mimì. Melodia e sentimento sono stati considerati sufficienti sia a giustificare l'imperituro fascino dell'opera sia a screditare le sue qualità più forti e il suo effetto più profondo. E'interessante notare come in Inghilterra, dove il pubblico della première fu conquistato dall'opera così decisamente, un disamore verso la musica di Puccini in generale abbia prevalso così a lungo presso tanti musicisti e musicofili. Persino così tardi come nel 1944 Peter Pears scrisse a Benjamin Britten "È musica sporca": stava cantando Rodolfo in una nuova, nient'affatto sentimentale produzione del Sadler's Wells – ciononostante se ne sentiva, in un certo senso, contaminato.

Se ciò è cambiato si deve in parte ad un regolare, crescente apprezzamento della composizione vista come un tutto, i cui elementi si uniscono con una maestria che impegna la mente analitica e ne crea qualcosa di totalmente diverso dalla *comédie larmoyante* percepito dai suoi denigratori. Libri quali la biografia critica di Mosco Carner (1958) e il più breve ma non meno suggestivo *Puccini, Keeper of the Seal* (pure del 1958), di Edward Greenfield, hanno portato intelligenza all'opera di questo emotivo compositore – e l'effetto non è stato una dicotomia in cui procedimenti cerebrali ed intuitivi venivano separati e distinti, ma piuttosto una simbiosi, un'evoluzione emotiva ed intellettuale risultante in un'unica entità. "Apprendere" *La bohème* in questo modo nel corso degli anni è stato un processo di arricchimento continuo. La struttura di ogni atto, la sua relazione con gli altri, i rapporti fra i motivi, vengono tutti scoperti gradatamente, come generalmente avviene in una grande opera d'arte. Stranamente (così può sembrare) è un processo paragonabile a quello di "apprendere" il poema di Eliot, *The Waste Land*: schegge si attaccano alla memoria come frammenti di una melodia, e gradatamente si congiungono, il loro significato chiarificandosi con il loro approfondimento.

Si prenda, ad esempio, l'Atto II. È un piccolo capolavoro di per se, con la sua profusione d'idee melodiche (otto vengono subito alla mente), la varietà del tessuto (passaggi corali e solistici, voci sole in concertato, la voce di un bambino o una voce fuori scena, banda militare fuori scena, tutte le forze unite), il raggio della "lingua" (la tenerezza degli amanti, l'eccitazione pre-natalizia della folla, sfuriate e rimostranze, melodioso incanto e ringiovanimento estatico).

Ma tutti questi elementi, e la meravigliosa maniera in cui vengono congiunti, sono – in un certo senso – secondari all'efficacia dell'atto e al posto che occupa all'interno dell'opera nel suo insieme. È lo scherzo di una sinfonia, un brillante *allegro* in tono maggiore; è anche un'affermazione, entro quello che diverrà un contesto tragico, della commedia umana, in cui i singoli personaggi sono visti in prospettiva quali parte di una scena più vasta. Inoltre, per gran parte del tempo (anche se non sempre) la musica è "organica", strettamente congiunta al corpo degli altri atti, più lunghi e più seri. In tal modo le frasi degli amanti formano un'elusiva variazione sulla musica amorosa dell'Atto I. Persino il disegno delle battute introduttive degli ottoni è connesso ad un'altra sequenza introduttiva, quella dell'Atto III, dove gli accordi paralleli non hanno nota centrale a riscaldarli ma restano vuoti e freddi come l'alba nevosa del giorno in cui i timori allungano la loro ombra crescente e le speranze svaniscono.

L'intera costruzione dell'opera è trafitta da contrasti, recando i'impronta della famosa frase nel romanso di Henri Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, dal quale Puccini e il suo librettista presero la loro ispirazione: "Una vita allegra ma terribile". Fu un argomento sollevato anche dal critico del *Times* che citò ulteriormente da Murger. "Questi bohemiens", disse, "sono soggetti ad estremi, stoici e spendaccioni, che si adattano al cambiar del vento della fortuna:

> La pioggia o la polvere, il freddo o il caldo; nulla ferma questi ardimentosi avventurieri. Astemi come anacoreti quando son pressati dal bisogno; ma se cade un pò di fortuna nelle loro mani vedi come partono in quarta nelle imprese più rovinose.

Le semplici, dirette divisioni del primo e quarto atto riflettono questo modello di contrasti. I mascolini lazzi e rozze facezie della prima metà contrastano con il romantico lirismo della seconda e ciò implica di per se un ulteriore contrasto, con il primo atto delirante nella sua gioia, il quarto frenetico nella tragedia. Nel terzo atto gli equilibri sono più sottili. Qui i contrasti sono intessuti nel materiale, a cominciare con l'evocazione di calore interno ed allegria, con le voci e i frammenti della canzone di Musetta che si sentono venire dall'osteria contrapposti al freddo esterno e alla patetica figura della stravolta Mimì. L'atto viene al culmine nel quartetto che rappresenta i modi contrastanti dell'intera opera, mentre le lunghe ed accorate frasi di Mimì e Rodolfo si uniscono alle esclamazioni essenzialmente comiche e declamatorie di Musetta e Marcello. Spesso riapppare uno sconsolato ricordo dell'abbaino, con il motivo di quattro note che tanto

vigorosamente mette in moto l'opera (e l'Atto IV). E mentre Mimì e Rodolfo lentamente escono di scena e la loro musica gradatamente si affievolisce, si potrebbe pensare che l'atto finisca qui – ma improvvisamente compare un fortissimo dell'orchestra, rumoroso, brusco e definitivo come lo sbattere di una porta.

In parte questo è Puccini, l'artista, che completa la sua scena con un riferimento al suo inizio (quelle due note all'unisono, ta-tum, che hanno alzato il sipario circa venticinque minuti fa). Prima di quel colpo sbattuto di *fortissimo* il pubblico certamente avrebbe quasi sempre cominciato ad applaudire, pensando che l'atto fosse finito, uscendo alla spicciolata con la musica tenera-triste degli amanti. Con ciò sarebbe stato rappresentativo dei critici di Puccini che lo criticano prima di averlo ascoltato fino in fondo. E trascurando l'altro elemento nella mescolanza di contrasti si perdono gran parte di quello che *La bohème* essenzialmente è. I termini di Murger, si ricordi, erano "allegra ma terribile". Se pensiamo alla *Bohème* come Mimì si potrebbe supporre che Puccini avesse diluito questa frase come "dolce ma triste". In effetti, l'allegria e il terrore (ovvero, il "terribile") sono anch'essi al fulcro dell'opera. Strutturalmente l'allegria ne occupa quasi la metà. Il "terribile" è in giacenza. Sappiamo che i bohemiens spesso hanno fame e spesso sono infelici; che Mimì è fragile, tossisce e rischia di morire. Ma il terrore colpisce. Non credo ci sia nessuno, per sottile ed intima che possa essere la sua conoscenza dell'opera, che non senta lo shock di quel brullo accordo minore prima dell'angosciato grido del povero Rodolfo: "Mimì"! Il lamento dei violini, ormai senza più freno, ed il gruppetto delle persone in scena, rincantucciate, che si consolano a vicenda nel dolore, divengono, in quell'istante, il ritratto stesso di un'umanità abbattuta della disgrazia.

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La trama

Atto I

È la vigilia di Natale in un abbaino nel Quartiere Latino di Parigi. Rodolfo e Marcello tentano di lavorare ma hanno tutti e due molto freddo. Rodolfo decide di bruciare il manoscritto a cui sta lavorando per generare un po' di calore. Arriva il loro amico Colline e poco dopo giungono due ragazzetti con del cibo, vino e combustibile. A loro fa seguito Schaunard che ha comprato le provvigioni; gli è avanzato un po' di denaro e suggerisce che, essendo la vigilia di Natale, potrebbero andare a mangiare fuori. Mentre sono pronti per

uscire arriva il padrone di casa che esige l'affitto. Riescono ad evitare di pagare e vanno via, lasciando Rodolfo che deve finire un articolo.

Viene bussato alla porta. La vicina di Rodolfo, Mimì, è venuta a chiedergli del fuoco per la sua candela. Entrando è sul punto si svenire e lascia cadere la candela e la chiave della sua stanza. Quando si è ristabilita i due si mettono a cercare la chiave. Rodolfo la trova ma se la infila in tasca pretendendo di continuare a cercarla. Le loro mani non tardano a toccarsi. Rodolfo le parla di se e lei fa altrettanto. Gli amici chiamano Rodolfo dal fondo delle scale, ma lui risponde che andrà a incontrarli al Caffè Momus portandosi dietro Mimì.

Atto II

Gli amici vagano per i banchini del mercato fuori del Caffè Momus. Andando verso il Caffè Rodolfo e Mimì si fermano e Rodolfo compra a Mimì una cuffietta rosa. Continuano a camminare e Mimì viene presentata agli amici di Rodolfo. I cinque si siedono insieme al Caffè e ordinano da mangiare e da bere. Marcello si accalora quando vede Musetta, una sua antica fiamma, che passa con Alcindoro, un vecchio e danaroso ammiratore. Musetta prende un tavolo e ordina con grande prodigalità. Marcello e Musetta fingono di essere indifferenti l'uno all'altra, ma alfine Musetta manda via Alcindoro, ordinandogli di andare a farle accomodare le scarpe che le sono strette, e si getta fra braccia di Marcello.

Quando arriva il momento di pagare il conto, gli amici si accorgono di aver già speso il denaro avanzato a Schaunard e così il conto viene lasciato a carico di Alcindoro!

Atto III

Alle mura della città, la Barrière d'Enfer, in una fredda alba di febbraio, i doganiere perquisiscono gli operai che entrano in città. Marcello sta lavorando in un'osteria e Mimì è venuta a chiedere a lui di parlare a Rodolfo la cui gelosia sta rovinando i loro rapporti. Marcello acconsente e la manda a casa. Nell'osteria Rodolfo si è appisolato; quando si sveglia ed esce Mimì si nasconde vicino all'osteria. Dal suo nascondiglio ascolta Rodolfo che dice a Marcello che Mimì è molto malata e che, a suo parere, la sua sola probabilità di sopravvivere sta nel lasciarlo, abbandonando la sua vita di privazioni. Mimì rivela la sua presenza con un attacco di tosse. Mimì e Rodolfo decidono di non separarsi fin quando non sia arrivata la primavera. Frattanto Marcello, che è rientrato nell'osteria, accusa Musetta di civettare con uno sconosciuto e i due terminano la loro relazione.

Atto IV
È primavera e Rodolfo e Marcello sono di nuovo soli. Schaunard e Colline arrivano con del magro cibo e i quattro amici pretendono di fare una cenetta con musica e balli. Mentre stanno divertendosi entra d'impeto Musetta con la notizia che Mimì è giù di sotto, troppo debole per salire le scale. Rodolfo si precipita ad aiutarla e gli altri le preparano un letto. Mentre Rodolfo si occupa di Mimì Musetta gli spiega che Mimì aveva voluto tornare nell'abbaino dove era stata tanto felice con lui. Musetta, Colline e Schaunard lasciano soli Rodolfo e Mimì, ed i due ricordano l'amore che li aveva uniti e il loro primo incontro. A poco a poco gli amici ritornano ma è troppo tardi. Mimì è morta.

Traduzione: Marcella Barzetti

Alan Opie è nato in Cornovaglia e ha studiato alla Guildhall School of Music and Drama e presso il London Opera Centre. Ha iniziato la sua carriera con la English National Opera (allora Sadler's Wells) dalla quale fu ingaggiato quale primo baritono quando era ancora studente. Fra i ruoli che ha cantato per questa compagnia si citano: la parte di protagonista nel *Barbiere di Siviglia* e nel Dr. Faust di Busoni; Germont (*La traviata*); Eisenstein e Falke (*Die Fledermaus*); Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*); Papageno (*Il flauto magico*); Sancho Panza (*Don Chisciotte*) e Taddeo (*L'italiana in Algeri*).

Contemporaneamente alla sua attività con la English National Opera, Alan Opie ha preso parte alle rappresentazioni di altri principali teatri britannici (fra le quali, *Luisa Miller*, per Opera North), mentre la sua carriera in campo internazionale lo ha portato a Bayreuth (Beckmesser) e si è estesa alle stagioni liriche di Chicago, Santa Fe, Parigi, Amsterdam, Vienna, Bruxelles e Berlino. I suoi numerosi dischi includono *Peter Grimes* (per Chandos, vincitore del premio *Grammy Awards*), *Gloriana*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, il ruolo di protagonista nell'*Ulisse* di Dallapiccola e il *Barbiere di Siviglia* e *Pagliacci* (per Chandos / Peter Moores Foundation).

Nato nel Galles da genitori irlandesi–gallesi, **Dennis O'Neill** è tenore di fama mondiale e specialista del repertorio verdiano. Da anni è legato alla Royal Opera House Covent Garden dove i suoi ruoli hanno incluso Rodolfo (*La bohème*), il Duca (*Rigoletto*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Edgar (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Macduff (*Macbeth*), Gustavo (*Un ballo in maschera*), Foresto (*Attila*), Otello, Don Carlos, Radames (*Aida*) e Jacopo (*I due Foscari*). Negli Stati Uniti ha cantato per la

Metropolitan Opera e la Chicago Lyric Opera e in numerosi concerti.

È spesso ospite della Bayerische Staatsoper di Monaco di Baviera dove il suo debutto nel *Ballo in maschera* è stato seguito da un nuovo allestimento de *Il trovatore* con Giuseppe Sinopoli, e dalla sua partecipazione a *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Tosca*, *Simon Boccanegra* e *Aida*. Dennis O'Neill conduce inoltre un'intensa attività concertistica ed ha cantato in tutta l'Europa con direttori quali Riccardo Muti, Sir Colin Davis e Sir Simon Rattle. La sua discografia include *Tosca* e *Cavalleria rusticana* (ambedue per Chandos / Peter Moores Foundation), *Der Rosenkavalier*, diretta da Sir Georg Solti, *Die Fledermaus*, *Macbeth* e *La fanciulla del West*.

Alastair Miles, riconosciuto in campo internazionale quale uno dei preminenti cantanti britannici, ha cantato in teatri lirici di tutto il mondo, fra i quali la Metropolitan Opera House, l'Opéra national de Paris, la Bastille, e a Vienna, San Francisco, Amsterdam ed alla Royal Opera House Covent Garden. I suoi ruoli hanno incluso Giorgio (*I Puritani*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Basilio, Figaro, la parte di protagonista in *Oberto*, Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*) e Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*).

Una felice attività concertistica lo porta ovunque ad esibirsi con direttori quali Carlo Maria Giulini, Zubin Mehta, Kurt Masur e John Eliot Gardiner. I suoi numerosi dischi includono *Elijah* di Mendelssohn, il Requiem di Verdi, *Saul* e *Agrippina* di Handel, così come *Medea in Corinto*, *Orazi e Curiazi*, *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* e *Maria regina d'Inghilterra* (tutti per Opera Rara).

William Dazeley si è laureato presso Jesus College, Cambridge, e ha studiato canto alla Guildhall School of Music and Drama. I premi da lui conseguiti includono il Decca–Kathleen Ferrier Prize, il Richard Tauber Prize e il Walther Gruner International Lieder Prize. Il suo esteso repertorio lirico comprende la parte di protagonista in *Don Giovanni*, in *Owen Wingrave*, in *Billy Budd* e in *Eugene Onegin*, Papageno (*Il flauto magico*), Pelleas, Mowgli (*Baa Baa Black Sheep* di Michael Berkeley), Danilo (*La vedova allegra*) e il Conte e Rodolfo (*Der ferne Klang*). Ha cantato per la Royal Opera, Opera North, Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Teatro Regio di Torino, Opera de Lyon e New Israeli Opéra. I suoi dischi includono *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *The Rescue of Penelope* di Britten e il *Faust* di Busoni.

Andrew Shore è ora riconosciuto quale il più insigne baritono-buffo britannico. Dal suo

debutto nel 1988 con la English National Opera i suoi ruoli hanno incluso Falstaff, Dieg (in *The Making of the Representative of Planet 8* di Philip Glass), Papageno (*Il flauto magico*). Monsieur Calcul (*La belle Vivette*), Don Pasquale e Gianni Schicchi. Ha anche cantato con Kent Opera, Opera North, Welsh National Opera, New Israeli Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, e a Lione, Montpelier, Barcellona e Amburgo. I suoi dischi includono *Il barbiere di Siviglia* e *Tosca* (per Chandos / Peter Moores Foundation) e *The Makropulos Affair*.

Cynthia Haymon è nata in Florida, a Jacksonville. Dal suo debutto nel 1985 nel ruolo di Harriet in *Harriet, a Woman called Moses* di Thea Musgrave nella prima mondiale per la Virginia Opera, Cynthia Haymon ha cantato al Covent Garden (Bess e Mimì), Glyndebourne, Amburgo, Monaco di Baviera ed in molti altri prestigiosi teatri lirici. Il suo debutto europeo ebbe luogo nel 1986 nella parte di Bess (*Porgy and Bess*) nell'acclamata produzione di Trevor Nunn per Glyndebourne; altri ruoli includono Liù (*Turandot*) ad Amburgo e Monaco di Baviera; Amor (*Orfeo* di Gluck) al Theatre Royal de la Monnaie, Bruxelles e Pamina (*Il flauto magico*) alla Bastille; Micaela (*Carmen*) con la Israeli Philarmonic Orchestra e Seattle Opera, e Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) per la Seattle Opera.

In concerti Cynthia Haymon ha cantato con la Israeli Philarmonic sotto la direzione di Kurt Masur; con la London Symphony Orchestra con Myung-Whun Chung e Michael Tilson Thomas, con la Cleveland Orchestra e con la Boston Symphony Orchestra. La sua discografia include *A Child of our Time* di Tippett (per Chandos), un disco di liriche "Where the Music Comes From – American Songs" e *Porgy and Bess*.

Mark Milhofer ha studiato canto alla Guildhall School of Music and Drama e con Neil Mackie e Bernard Dickerson. Nel 1992 è entrato nella compagnia della Glyndebourne Festival Opera, partecipando in *Così fan tutte* e *Morte a Venezia*. Ha cantato la parte di protagonista nell'Idomeneo e quella di Lensky nell'*Eugene Onegin* alla Oxford Playhouse, Don Ramiro (*La cenerentola*) per il Teatro Regio di Parma, Tamino (*Il flauto magico*) con la European Chamber Orchestra, *Dido ed Enea* e *Curlew River* per l'Opera Factory, e *The Indian Queen* ed in concerti con il King's Consort in tutta l'Europa.

Marie McLaughlin si è ormai saldamente affermata quale uno dei principali soprani lirici del mondo. I suoi successi internazionali hanno

incluso Susanna, al Festival di Salisburgo, la Metropolitan Opera e la Royal Opera House; Zerlina, Susanna e Ilia per la State Opera di Vienna, Donna Elvira e Violetta a Glyndebourne, e Susanna a Ginevra. Svolge regolare attivà ad Amburgo, Berlino e Monaco di Baviera ed ha participato alle stagioni della English National Opera, e dei teatri lirici di Colonia, Losanna e Los Angeles.

Marie McLaughlin ha cantato in concerti con alcuni dei più famosi direttori quali Leonard Bernstein, Bernard Haitink e Giuseppe Sinopoli; la sua discografia include Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*, diretta da Sir Neville Marriner), Despina (*Così fan tutte*, diretta da James Levine) e dischi di liriche di Schubert e Strauss. E' apparsa inoltre in video-registrazioni di *Rigoletto*, *La traviata* e *Carmen*.

La carriera vocale di Geoffrey Mitchell si distingue per il repertorio eccezionalmente ampio, che va dalla musica antica a quella contemporanea. Tale fatto gli ha fruttato numerosi inviti della BBC ad esibirsi nel ruolo di direttore e, in seguito, un'attività più impegnativa in sintonia con propri cantanti nonché la consequente formazione del **Geoffrey Mitchell Choir**. Dopo le prime registrazioni su disco il complesso ha potuto stabilire regolari rapporti di lavoro con la compagnis Musica Rara, per la quale ha registrato ben 15 opere. Attualmente gode di crescente reputazione grazie agli ulteriore incarichi ricevuti dalla BBC e dalle case discografiche internazionali.

Il **Peter Kay Children's Choir** (Coro di fanciulli) offre ai giovani cantanti buone prospettive in materia di opera lirica, concerti, annunci pubblicitari televisivi e radio, attività di beneficienza, festival e produzioni teatrali, in Gran Bretagna, Francia, Belgio, Olanda, Germania, Spagna ed USA. I suoi membri sono stati prescelti tra adolescenti con esperienza di esecuzioni corali, previo invito ed audizione presso l'English National Opera, di cui Peter Kay è consultente, il Finchley Children's Music Group, il New London Children's Choir, The Jennifer Lilleystone Singers, nonché varie scuole di tutta Londra e dell'Inghiltera meridionale.

Con la constituzione della **Philharmonia Orchestra** Walter Legge realizzò il suo grande sogno di creare un complesso di classe internazionale con strumentisti selezionati rigorosamente. L'Orchestra, che diede il primo concerto nell'ottobre del 1945 sotto la bacchetta di Sir Thomas Beecham, si affermò ben presto come uno tra i complessi mondiali di effettiva grandezza. La Philharmonia, da tempo associata a numerosi direttori di fama internazionale, è

senz'altro il complesso sinfonico con il maggior numero di registrazioni discografiche all'attivo (oltre mille), che includono alcune opere per la Peter Moores Foundation/Opera Rara. La sua posizione di "principale orchestra londinese" è dovuta all'energia, all'incomparabile intensità sonora e all'impegno con cui commissiona ed esegue opere musicale di eminenti compositori contemporanei, come quelle del defunto Witold Lutoslawski, di Sir Harrison Birtwistle e di James MacMillan, ospite della Philharmonia Orchestra.

David Parry ha studiato con Sergiu Celibidache ed ha iniziato la sua carriera come assistente di Sir John Pritchard. Ha fatto il suo debutto con l'English Music Theatre ed è poi diventato direttore stabile della Städtische Bühnen Dortmund e di Opera North. Dal 1983 al 1987 è stato direttore artistico di Opera 80 e dal 1992 Direttore Musicale fondatore del festival di opera contemporanea dell'Almeida Opera.

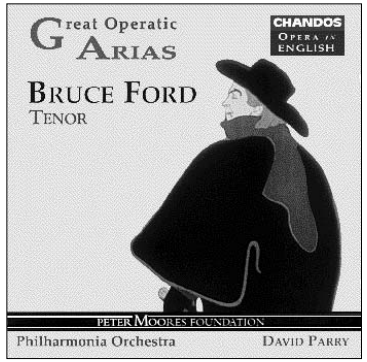
Svolge un'intensa attività sia nel teatro lirico sia in campo sinfonico. Il suo repertorio da va Mozart e l'opera italiana del Settecento a Janáček e Britten e la musica contemporanea. In Inghilterra ha diretto frequentemente alla English National Opera ed in concerti sinfonici con la Philharmonia. Nel 1996 ha debuttato al festival di Glyndebourne con *Così fan tutte*.

Dirige spesso in Spagna nella maggior parte dei teatri lirici e con orchestra sinfoniche. Ha diretto la prima spagnola di *Peter Grimes* a Madrid e nel 1996 il primo allestimento spagnolo della *Carriera di un libertino*, ha inaugurato due nuove sale di concerti con la Nona sinfonia di Beethoven ed un nuovo teatro lirico con la *Carmen*. Altre tournées l'hanno portato in Italia, dove ha diretto *Ricciardo e Zoraide* al Festival Rossini di Pesaro, in Francia, Germania, Belgio, Olanda, e Svezia dove ha diretto con grande successo *Il sogno di una notte di mezza estate* di Britten.

Fuori d'Europa David Parry si è esibito al festival internazionale di Hong Kong, con l'orchestra sinfonica UNAM a Città del Messico e in una serie di rappresentazioni della *Carmen* in Giappone. Nel 1996 ha diretto *Katya Kabanova* in un nuovo allestimento per il festival della Nuova Zelanda.

Ha iniciso numerosi dischi per Opera Rara, fra questi il più recente è quello di *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* di Donizetti, che ha vinto il Priz Cecilia in Belgio; per Chandos ha diretto *Cavelleria rusticana*, l'acclamato disco della *Tosca* e un disco d'arie operatiche con Bruce Ford.

Opera in English on Chandos



CHAN 3006

CHAN 3004

La bohème

COMPACT DISC ONE

Act I

In the Attic

A spacious window from which one sees an expanse of snow-clad roofs, on the left a stove. A table, a small cupboard, a little book-case, four chairs, a picture easel, a bed; a few books, many packs of cards, two candlesticks. A door in the middle; another on the left.

(*Curtain rises quickly. Rodolfo and Marcello – Rodolfo looks pensively out of the window. Marcello works at his painting 'The Passage of the Red Sea' with hands nipped with cold, and warms them by blowing on them from time to time, often changing position, on account of the frost.*)

Marcello (*seated, continuing to paint*)
1 This Red Sea Passage feels damp and chill to me.
As if a stream down my back were flowing.
(*He goes a little way back from the easel to look at the picture.*)
But, in revenge a Pharaoh I will drown!
(*He turns to his work.*)
And you?

Rodolfo (*looking at Marcello*)
See how the smoke is
lazily drifting up from
the stoves all over Paris.
(*pointing to the fireless stove*)
And yet that stove beside us
does nothing more to earn an honest living
than lie in idleness, just like a lord!

Marcello
It's a very long time since
we paid his lawful wages.

Rodolfo
Of what use are those forests,
all white under the snow?

Marcello
Rodolfo, let me tell you a thought that
overwhelms me:
(*blowing on his fingers*)
I'm simply frozen.

Rodolfo (*approaching Marcello*)
And I, Marcello, to be candid have no faith in
the sweat on my forehead.

Marcello
All my fingers are frozen. Just as if they'd been
touching that iceberg,
touching that block of marble, the heart of false
Musetta!
(*He heaves a long sigh, laying aside his palette and brushes, and ceases painting.*)

Rodolfo
Ah! Love's a stove that squanders a lot of fuel…

Marcello
…too quickly!

Rodolfo
Where the man does the burning…

Marcello
…and the woman the lighting:

Rodolfo
As the one becomes ashes…

Marcello
…the other stands and watches.

Rodolfo
But meanwhile here we're freezing…

Marcello
…and we're dying of hunger!

Rodolfo
We must have a fire…

Marcello (*seizing a chair and about to break it up*)
I have it! This chair will be our salvation.

(*Rodolfo energetically resists Marcello's project.*)

Rodolfo (*joyous at an idea which has seized him*)
Eureka! (*He runs to the table and picks up a bulky manuscript.*)

Marcello
You've found it?

Rodolfo
Yes! When genius is wakened ideas come fast and
furious.

Marcello (*pointing to his picture*)
Let's burn the Red Sea!

Rodolfo
No. Think of the smell it would make here!
But my drama, my beautiful drama shall give us
warmth.

Marcello (*with comic terror*)
You're not going to read it? You'll freeze me.

Rodolfo
No, the paper in flame shall be burning;
the soul to its heaven returning.
(*with importance*)
Great loss, but the world yet must bear it
for Rome is in peril!

Marcello
Great soul!

Rodolfo (*giving Marcello a portion of the manuscript*)
Let's start with the first act.

Marcello
Right!

Rodolfo
Tear it!

Marcello
And light it.

(*Rodolfo strikes a flint on steel, lights a candle and goes to the stove with Marcello; together they set fire to a part of the manuscript thrown into the fireplace, then both draw up their chairs and sit down, delightedly warming themselves.*)

Rodolfo
How cheerful the blaze!

Marcello
How cheerful the blaze!

(*The door at the back opens violently and Colline*

enters frozen stiff, stamping his feet and angrily throwing on the table a bundle of books tied up in a handkerchief.)

Colline
Surely the day of judgement would seem to be dawning!
On Christmas Eve they will not take my volumes for pawning!
(*He checks himself, seeing fire in the stove.*)
What are you burning?

Rodolfo (*to Colline*)
Quiet! You're watching my drama…

Marcello
…in action.

Colline
Indeed I find it sparkling!

Rodolfo
Brilliant!

Colline
It's too short-winded.

Rodolfo
Brevity's deemed a virtue.

Colline (*taking the chair from Rodolfo*)
Your chair if you'll permit me.

Marcello
I cannot stand these endless intermissions.
Hurry!

Rodolfo (*taking another portion of the manuscript*)
Here is the next act.

Marcello (*to Colline*)
Hush, not a whisper.

(*Rodolfo tears up the manuscript and throws it on the fireplace, the flame revives. Colline moves his chair nearer and warms his hands, Rodolfo is standing near the two with the rest of the manuscript.*)

Colline
2 Profound and thoughtful!

Marcello
Solemn and wise!

Rodolfo
In that blue smoke my drama is dying
full of the ardent yearning of love!

Colline
What fiery pages!

Marcello
There, those were kisses!

Rodolfo
Three acts at once I desire to hear.

(*He throws on the fire the remaining manuscript.*)

Colline
Only the daring can dream such visions.

Rodolfo, Marcello and Colline
Dreams that go up in flames just like that.
(*The fire dies.*)

Marcello
Ye Gods! See the fire's nearly perished!

Colline
How fragile the drama we cherished!

Marcello
They crackle, they curl up; and die!

Colline and Marcello
The Author! Now, down with him we cry!

(*From the middle door enter two boys, one bearing food, wine and cigars, the other a bundle of wood. At the noise, the three at the fire turn round, and with a cry of wonder they fall upon the provisions borne by the boys and deposit them on the table; Colline takes the wood and carries it near the stove.*)

Rodolfo (*surprised*)
3 Firewood!

Marcello (*surprised)*
Cigars!

Colline (*surprised*)
Bordeaux!

Rodolfo, Marcello and Colline (*enthusiastically*)
So the luxury of Christmas
we are fated yet to know.

(*Exeunt the two boys.*)

Schaunard (*enters with a triumphant air, throwing some coins on the ground*)
Take these as a token:
the Bank of France is broken.

Colline (*picking up the coins*)
Collect them! Collect them!

Marcello (*incredulously*)
They're pieces of tin!

Schaunard (*showing one to Marcello*)
Are you deaf? Are you blind?
Whose face do they show?

Rodolfo (*bowing*)
King Louis Philippe!
To my monarch I bow.

All four
Shall King Louis Philippe at our feet lie low?

(*They place the money on the table. Schaunard continues to recount his good luck; the others do not listen to him, but go on arranging everything and putting wood on the stove.*)

Schaunard
Now I'll explain; this gold here, or rather silver
has its own noble story.

Marcello
Let us heat up the furnace!

Colline
So much cold has it suffered.

Schaunard
When an English milord! Lord or a duke
or something, required a musician.

Marcello (*throwing Colline's books from the table*)
Off!
Let us set up the table!

Schaunard
I fly there!

Rodolfo
Where is the food?

Colline
There!

(*They make up a great fire in the stove.*)

Marcello
Here!

Schaunard
And I'm admitted.
He greets me, then I ask him.

(*They arrange the viands, while Rodolfo lights the other candle.*)

Colline
Here's some roast beef.

Marcello
And here's a pastry!

Schaunard
'When shall we start the lessons?'
He answers 'Right away!'
'Just look there'; pointing upstairs to a parrot in its cage,
he commands me 'You must play until
that bird has expired.' And so it was:
three days I played and yelled.
I use all the charm of my masculine perfection,
to captivate attention…
I tempt the bird with parsley…
and then his wings out-spreading,
the parrot opened his beak,
A tiny piece of parsley
and like Socrates he died.

Rodolfo
Brilliantly lightens the room into splendour.

Marcello (*puts the two lighted candles on the table*)
Here are the candles.

Colline
What lovely pastries!

Marcello
No cloth here on the table?

Rodolfo
An idea.

Colline and Marcello
The Paris evening news.

Rodolfo
Excellent paper!
One eats a meal and swallows news together.

(*Arranging the newspapers as a table-cloth, Rodolfo and Marcello bring the four chairs to the table while Colline busies himself about the eatables.*)

(*Seeing that no one is listening, he grasps Colline as he passes with a plate.*)
Colline
Who?

Schaunard
The devil take the lot of you to Hades.
(*seeing the rest in the act of commencing to eat the cold pie*)

What are you doing?
(*With a solemn gesture he extends his hand over the pie and prevents his friends from eating it, then takes the eatables from the table, and puts them in the cupboard.*)
No! Dainties of this kind
are to be saved for later,
saved for a morrow
full of gloom and sorrow.
Why dine at home
on this the eve of Christmas
when in the Latin quarter's busy streets cafés
will offer all your fav'rite dishes.
And when the luscious smells of cooking will fill the air
with tempting odour,
there, singing joyously, pretty girls will gather.

(*Rodolfo, Marcello and Colline surround Schaunard merrily.*)

Rodolfo, Marcello and Colline
On this merry Christmas Eve.

Schaunard
Girls who are looking for a student lover!
You must be more religious my friends, I beg you.
It's fine to drink here,
but we're dining out!
(*Rodolfo locks the door, then all go to the table and pour out wine; there are two knocks at the door; they are all surprised.*)

Benoit (*off-stage*)
4 Hello!

Marcello
Who is that?

Benoit
Benoit.

Marcello
That's the voice of the landlord!

(*They put down their glasses.*)

Schaunard
Bolt the door quickly!

Colline (*calling towards the door*)
No-one at home.

Schaunard
I've locked it.

Benoit (*off-stage*)
I want just one word.

Schaunard (*After consulting his friends he goes and opens the door.*)
Just one!

Benoit (*enters smiling, showing a paper to Marcello*)
Rent.

Marcello (*receiving him with great cordiality*)
Hallo! Give him a seat, friends.

Rodolfo
Quickly.

Benoit (*defending himself*)
Do not trouble, I'd like to…

Schaunard (*with gentle firmness insists on his sitting down*)
There now.

Marcello (*offering Benoit a glass of wine*)
Some wine sir?

(*Benoit, Rodolfo, Marcello and Schaunard seated. Colline standing*)

Benoit
Thank you!

Rodolfo and Colline
Your health!

Schaunard
Drink up!

(*All drink. Benoit puts down his glass and turns to Marcello showing him the document.*)

Benoit
It's the quarter's rent I call for.

Marcello (*ingenuously*)
Glad to hear it.

Benoit
And therefore…

Schaunard (*interrupting him*)
Another glass sir?

Benoit
Thank you!

Rodolfo and Colline (*raising their glasses*)
Your health!

Rodolfo, Marcello, Shaunard and Colline
(*all touching Benoit's glass*)
Here's to your good health, sir!

(*They sit and drink; Colline takes the stool near the easel, and sits down also.*)

Benoit (*addressing Marcello*)
To you I come as the quarter now is ended.
You had promised…

Marcello (*showing Benoit the money on the table*)
And I shall keep my promise.

Rodolfo (*with amazement, aside to Marcello*)
What's this?

Schaunard (*aside to Marcello*)
You blockhead.

Marcello (*to Benoit, ignoring the other two*)
You've seen it? Then lay
all care aside, sir, and join our friendly circle.
(*resting his elbows on the table*)
Tell me how old you are,
my dear m'sieur Benoit…

Benoit
My age? Spare me, I pray!

Rodolfo
Our own age, less or more?

Benoit
Much more, very much more.

(*While they make Benoit chatter, they fill up his glass as soon as it is empty.*)

Colline
You're very frank I'm sure.

Marcello (*lowering his voice and in a mischievous tone*)
The other evening at Mabille they caught him
with a girl in his arms.

Benoit (*uneasy*)
Me?

Marcello
Deny it!

Benoit
The chance came.

Marcello (*flattering him*)
She was lovely.

Benoit (*half-drunk suddenly*)
Delightful!

Schaunard (*He slaps him on the shoulder.*)
Old rascal! Old knave!

Rodolfo
Old rascal!

Colline (*He slaps him on the shoulder.*)
Vile seducer!

Marcello
Casanova! Don Giovanni!

Benoit (*laughing*)
Ha! Ha!

Rodolfo
He's quite discerning.

Marcello
Her hair was red and curly.
Aflame with passion he seizes her and tames
her.

Benoit (*with increasing exultation*)
I'm ancient, but I'm sturdy.

Rodolfo, Schaunard and Colline (*with ironical gravity*)
Flaming with love he teases her and shames
her.

Marcello
To him she yields her maiden's innocence.

Benoit (*confidentially*)
I was a timid youth
but now I'm getting even. You know, and my
one delight
is a merry lady… You know…
I do not like a woman
who is a mound of lard
or whose face is too round and moon-like,
but skinny, downright skinny, No, oh no!
It is a thin woman's satisfaction
to drive us to distraction.
Full of whining and kisses
as for instance my misses…

(*Marcello bangs his fist down on the table and rises; the others follow his example; Benoit looks at them in bewilderment.*)

Marcello
This man is married
yet harbours lustful
desires.

Schaunard and Colline
For shame!

Rodolfo
His vile pollution
empoisons our honest
abode.

Schaunard and Colline
Out!

(*Benoit staggers to his feet and tries in vain to speak.*)

Marcello
With perfume we must fumigate!

Colline
Drive him out, the reprobate.

Schaunard
Morality offended drives you from us.

(*They surround Benoit, and gradually push him to the door.*)

Benoit
I say… I say…

Rodolfo and Colline
Be silent.

Benoit (*more and more bewildered*)
Sirs, I beg you!

Marcello, Schaunard & Colline (*pushing Benoit outside the door*)
Be silent! Out, your lordship,
Out you go!
(*They all stand at the door, looking towards the landing of the staircase.*)
We wish your Lordship a pleasant Christmas Eve.
(*laughing*) Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Marcello
That has settled the rent!

Schaunard
And now off to Momus where dinner awaits.

Marcello
Long live the spendthrift!

Schaunard
Now let's share out the loot.

(*They divide the money on the table.*)

Rodolfo and Colline
Share it out.

Marcello (*holding out a cracked mirror to Colline*)
Girls await you there, angels from heaven.
Now you are rich, to decency pay tribute.
Bear, go and get your hair cut!

Colline
I'll scrape my first acquaintance
this very day with some tonsorial artist.
And bravely I'll surrender to
the outrage of the razor. Let's go…

Colline, Schaunard and Marcello (*humorously*)
Let's go!

Rodolfo
5 I'll stay here,
I must complete the article
for my new journal 'The Beaver'.

Marcello
Be quick then.

Rodolfo
Five minutes only. I've not much to do!

Colline
We will be waiting at the porter's lodge.

Marcello
We'll shout if you don't hurry.

Rodolfo
Five minutes only.

Schaunard
You must shorten the Beaver's growing tale!

(*Rodolfo takes a light from the table and goes to open the door; Marcello, Colline and Schaunard go out and descend the staircase.*)

Marcello (*off-stage*)
Look to the staircase!
Keep close to the handrail!

Rodolfo (*on the landing near the open door holding up the candle*)
Go slowly!

Colline (*off-stage*)
Infernal darkness.

Schaunard (*off-stage*)
May the porter be damned!

(*noise as of one falling*)

Colline (*crying out*)
Devil take it.

Rodolfo
Colline, are you dead yet?

Colline (*in the distance from the bottom of the staircase*)
No, not yet.

Marcello (*further off*)
Come quickly!

(*Rodolfo shuts the door, puts down the candle, clears a corner of the table, places on it pen and paper, then sits down and sets himself to write after having put out the other candle which had remained burning. He writes, breaks off, thinks, turns again to write. He is restless, destroys the writing and throws down the pen.*)

Rodolfo (*to himself*)
6 No inspiration.
(*There is a timid knock on the door.*)
Who's there?

Mimì (*off-stage*)
Excuse me.

Rodolfo (*rising*)
It's a lady!

Mimì
My candle, would you kindly light it.

Rodolfo (*running to open the door*)
Surely.

Mimì (*standing at the door with an extinguished candle and a key*)
Oh, thank you.

Rodolfo
Come in for just a moment.

Mimì
No, I cannot.

Rodolfo (*pressing*)
I beg you, enter.
(*Mimì enters, but is seized with a fit of coughing.*)
What is the matter?

Mimì (*coughs*)
It's nothing.

Rodolfo
You're pale and trembling.

Mimì
I'm exhausted, it's the staircase…

(*She swoons, and Rodolfo has hardly time to support her and place her on a chair while she drops her candlestick and key.*)

Rodolfo (*embarrassed*)
What can I do to help her? Ah! This!
(*He goes to fetch water and sprinkles it on her face. Looking at her with great interest*)
How very pale her face is!
(*She revives.*)
Do you feel better?

Mimì
Yes!

Rodolfo
It is very cold here, come near the fire I beg you.
(*Mimì makes signs in the negative.*)
One moment… A little wine…

Mimì
Thank you!

Rodolfo (*He gives her a glass and pours out the wine.*)
For you.

Mimì
Not too much, please!

Rodolfo
Like this?

Mimì
Thank you! (*She drinks.*)

Rodolfo
So young and so lovely.

Mimì (*Rising, she looks for her candlestick.*)
Now please allow me to light my candle.
I'm feeling better.

Rodolfo
Must you go now?

Mimì
Yes.

(*He sees the candlestick on the floor, picks it up, relights it and hands it to Mimì without speaking.*)

Mimì (*She prepares to go.*)
Thank you. And good evening.

Rodolfo (*He accompanies her to the door.*)
Well good evening.

(*He returns suddenly to the table.*)

Mimì (*outside*)
7 Oh! How dreadful! (*She re-enters, but stops on the threshold of the door which remains open.*)
The key of my poor attic!
Where can I have left it?

Rodolfo
Come, don't stand in the doorway;
the draught there will blow out your candle.

(*Mimì's candle goes out.*)

Mimì
Oh heavens! Light it again for me.

Rodolfo (*He runs with his candle, but as he nears the door his light too is blown out and the room remains in darkness.*)
Good lord! Mine has gone out too.

Mimì (*Groping about, she reaches the table and deposits the candlestick.*)
Ah! And the key, where can it be?

Rodolfo (*He finds himself near the door and fastens it.*)
What a nuisance!

Mimì
I'm so sorry.

Rodolfo
Where can it be?

Mimì (*with politeness, and advancing cautiously*)
Please forgive your tiresome neighbour.

Rodolfo (*turning where he hears the voice*)
Nothing, I assure you!

Mimì
Please forgive your tiresome neighbour…

Rodolfo
Do not mention it, I beg you.

Mimì
Look for it.
(*She looks for the key on the floor, sliding her feet over it.*)

Rodolfo
I'm looking!

(*He knocks against the table, deposits his candlestick and searches for the key with by patting his hands on the floor.*)

Mimì
Where can it be?

Rodolfo (*He finds the key; and lets an exclamation escape.*)
Ah!

Mimì
Have you found it?

Rodolfo (*He suddenly checks himself and puts the key in his pocket.*)
No!

Mimì
I thought you…

Rodolfo
I thought so too!

Mimì (*She searches by feeling.*)
Found it?

Rodolfo
Not yet!

(*He pretends to search; but guided by Mimì's voice and movement, tries to approach her. Mimì stoops to the floor, continually feeling. At this moment Rodolfo approaches her, and stooping, his hand meets Mimì's.*)

Rodolfo (*holding Mimì's hand*)
8 Your tiny hand is frozen!
Let me warm it into life.
Our search is useless. In darkness all is hidden.
But very soon now the moon will be shining
and in the moonlight our search will continue.
(*Mimì tries to withdraw her hand.*)
I beg you stay a moment
while I tell you very briefly
just who I am, what I do, and how I earn my
living. Shall I?
(*Mimì is silent; Rodolfo lets go her hand, and when recoiling she finds a chair, into which she drops as if overcome by emotion.*)
All right, I am, but a poor poet.
What's my vocation? Writing!
Is that a living? Hardly!

I'm poor but I am happy.
Ladies of rank and fashion
all inspire me with passion.

In dreams and fond illusions
or castles in the air…
Richer is none on earth than I!

Two lovely eyes have stolen
ev'ry precious possession from
my wealth of hidden treasures.

Your roguish eyes have robb'd me,
of all my dreams bereft me,
dreams so fair yet so fleeting,
fancies that are no more…

and yet I don't regret them.
For now is a moment of rapture,
a wondrous night waking!

Now you know all my story,
pray tell me yours.
Won't you tell me who are you?
May I not know?

Mimì (*She hesitates a little, but decides to speak.*)
9 Yes, I'm always called Mimì,
but my name is Lucia.
My story is
a brief one. In my poor room
I embroider silk and satin.
I'm content and happy,
I love to fashion
the rose and lily.
These flowers give me pleasure
as in magical accents
they speak to me of love, of love in springtime…
of fancies and of dreams and fond illusions,
such as poets, and only poets know…

Are you listening?

Rodolfo (*moved*)
Yes.

Mimì
I'm always called Mimì,
but I don't know why!
All by myself
I have my frugal supper;
I go to Mass quite seldom
yet say my prayers each day.
I'm alone but not lonely.
There in my room so white and cosy
I look above me into the sky.
But when the frost is over,
I see the sunlight greet me…
Spring's first awakening is all mine…
Her first bright sunbeam is mine!
How sweet is the rose that is opening
every petal I cherish.
Oh what delight
is a flower in blossom.
Alas! The flow'rs I make,
The flow'rs I fashion, alas! They have no
perfume!

More than just this I cannot find to tell you,
I'm your tiresome neighbour
who at an awkward moment intrudes upon you.

Schaunard (*from the courtyard*)
10 Hey! Rodolfo!

Colline (*from below*)
Rodolfo!

Marcello
Hullo! D'you hear us?
(*At the shouts of his friends Rodolfo is annoyed.*)
Don't dawdle!

Colline
Come on scribbler!

Schaunard
Hurry up there idler!

(*Getting more annoyed, Rodolfo finds his way to the window and opens it to answer his friends in the courtyard; from the open window a few rays of moonlight enter, brightening the room.*)

Rodolfo
I have still three lines to finish.

Mimì (*approaching the window a little*)
Who are they?

Rodolfo (*turning to Mimì*)
My comrades!

Schaunard
What's all this delay?

Marcello
Why stay so long alone there?

Rodolfo
I'm not lonely, I have company.
We'll meet you Chez Momus. Keep us two places;
we will follow quickly.

(*He remains still at the window to make sure his friends have gone.*)

Marcello, Shaunard and Colline (*gradually departing*)
Momus, Momus, Momus,
off to Momus discreetly we must go.
Momus, Momus, Momus,
And poetry will flow.

(*Mimì goes still nearer to the window, so that the moon's rays fall upon her. Turning, Rodolfo sees Mimì as if wreathed in light and contemplates her ecstatically.*)

Rodolfo
11 Lovely maid in the moonlight, vision entrancing
enfolded in the radiance from above;
With you before me
the dream that I would ever dream, now returns!

Mimì and Rodolfo (*with emotion*)
Heart to heart for evermore…
…bound by love's eternal enchantment.

Rodolfo (*putting his arm round Mimì*)
Love now shall rule our hearts,
now and forever lost in magic enchantment.

Mimì (*yielding to her lover's embrace*)
Sweet to my soul the magic voice
of love its song is singing.

Mimì and Rodolfo
Life's fairest flower is love!

(*He kisses Mimì.*)

Mimì (*disengaging herself*)
No, I beg you!

Rodolfo
I love you!

Mimì
Your friends are waiting.

Rodolfo
I am just dismissed then?

Mimì (*hesitating*)
I should like… but I dare not…

Rodolfo (*gently*)
Say!

Mimì (*coquettishly*)
Could I not come with you?

Rodolfo (*surprised*)
What? Mimì! (*suggestively*)
It would be far more pleasant to stay here.
Outside it's chilly.

Mimì (*with great abandon*)
I'll be close beside you!

Rodolfo
And then later?

Mimì
I wonder.

Rodolfo (*very gracefully to Mimì*)
Take my arm, my pretty maiden.

Mimì (*giving her arm to Rodolfo*)
I obey you my lord!

(*They go arm in arm to the door.*)

Rodolfo
You love me? Say…

Mimì (*with abandon*)
I love you.

(*They go out.*)

Mimì and Rodolfo (*off-stage*)
My love!

Curtain

Act II

In the Latin Quarter

Christmas Eve. A conflux of streets; where they meet, a square flanked by shops of all sorts; on one side, the Café Momus.

(*A vast, motley crowd; soldiers, serving-maids; boys, girls, children, students, work girls, gendarmes etc., etc. Outside their shops vendors are bawling, inviting purchasers. Aloof from the crowd, Rodolfo and Mimì walk up and down; Colline is near a rag shop. Schaunard stands outside a tinker's shop buying a pipe and a horn. Marcello is being hustled hither and thither. Sundry townsfolk are seated at a table outside the Café Momus. It is evening. The shops are decked with tiny lamps; a huge lantern lights up the entrance to the Café.*)

Hawkers (*outside their shops, shouting*)
12 Come, buy my oranges!
Fine apples! Look at them!
Hot roasted chestnuts!
Trinkets and crosses!
Fine Hardbake!
Excellent toffee!
Chocolate pasties!
Rich cream and frothy!
Try our candy!
Flower's for the ladies!
Cream for the babies!
Fat larks and ortolans!
Look at them!
Chocolate and toffee!
Chaffinches, ortolans, chestnuts all hot!
Who'll buy my carrots!

The Crowd (*including students, workgirls, townsfolk and others*)
What a racket! So noisy!
Hold tight to me, what uproar!
Come, let us pass!
Come along!
Let's go! Ah! Ho!
Make way there!
Emma! Why, don't you hear me!

Customers at the Café (*shouting to the waiters who run to and fro*)
Come along! Come along!
With the beer! Waiter!
A beer! Bring me a drink!
Come here! Come along! A beer!

Schaunard (*He blows the horn*)
What a dreadful D! What a dreadful D!
(*haggling with the tinker*) And how much will it be?
It's rather shabby,
but sound and not expensive!

(*He pays, and then carefully consigns his books to the various pockets of his long-coat.*)

(*Arm in arm, Rodolfo and Mimì push through the crowd and approach a bonnet-shop.*)

Rodolfo
Let's go.

Mimì
Let's go and buy the bonnet!

Rodolfo
Hold tightly to my arm, love! Let's go!

Mimì
To you I'm clinging. Let's go!

(*They enter the bonnet shop.*)

Marcello (*alone in the midst of the crowd, with a parcel under his arm, ogling the girls by whom he is jostled*)
I'm in the mood to shout and cry aloud.
Ho! Merry maiden! Will you play at love?
Let's play together the game of buy and sell!
(*accosting a girl*)
Who'll give a penny for my virgin heart?
(*The girl runs away, laughing.*)

Hawkers
Oranges! Salmon!

A Hawker (*crossing the stage and shouting*)
Who'll buy my plums?

Saleswomen
Buy our pretty scarf pins!
Try our toffee and our hardbake!

Schaunard
(*He strolls about in front of the Café Momus waiting for his friends; and armed with his huge pipe and hunting-horn, he intently watches the crowd.*)
Surging onward, swift and breathless, moves the madding throng,
as they seek the round of pleasure
in their merry and insane endeavour!

Colline (*He comes up, waving an old book in triumph.*)
Such a rare book and quite unique;
it's a volume of Runic rhyme!

Schaunard (*looking pityingly over Colline's shoulder*)
Honest fellow!

Marcello (*On reaching the Café he shouts to Schaunard and Colline.*)
To supper!

Schaunard and Colline
Rodolfo?

Marcello
He's gone to buy a bonnet!

Rodolfo (*coming out of the milliner's with Mimì*)
Come along; my friends are waiting here.

(*Marcello, Schaunard and Colline try to find an empty table outside the Café; but there is only one, which is occupied by townsfolk. The three friends glare furiously at the townsfolk, and then enter the Café.*)

Mimì (*drawing attention to her pretty new bonnet*)
Do you like this bonnet trimmed with roses?

Rodolfo
The colour suits your fair complexion.

Mimì (*looking into a shop window*)
That necklace is so pretty!

Rodolfo
I've an aunt, a millionairess.
When the good God wills to take her,
then I shall buy you many more like this.

(*Rodolfo and Mimì, thus chatting, proceed to the back of the stage and are lost in the crowd. At a shop in the rear, a shopman, gesticulating frantically, stands on a stool and offers underclothes, nightcaps etc. for sale. Girls in a group surround his shop, and gaily burst out laughing.*)

Citizens
Now let us follow the others.
Be careful, girls, be careful!
So noisy! What a racket!
Rue Mazarin's the nearest!
Let's get away, I'm choking!
Let's go to the Café. Let's go to the 'Momus'!

(*Enter from the café Colline, Schaunard and Marcello, carrying a table. A waiter follows with chairs. The townsfolk seated near seem vexed at the noise which the three friends are making, for they soon get up and walk away. Mimì and Rodolfo return: she notices a group of students.*)

Rodolfo (*in a tone of playful remonstrance*)
13 What is it?

Mimì
Are you jealous?

Rodolfo
The man in love is always jealous, darling!

Mimì
Then you love me?

Rodolfo
Ah! Yes, I love you! And you?

Mimì
I love you!

Colline
How I detest the vulgar crowd like Horace!

Schaunard
And when I am eating,
I can't stand being crowded.

Marcello (*to the waiter*)
We want a supper of the choicest!
Smartly!

Schaunard
We're hungry!

Students and Work Girls
To the Café! Come on! Let's go!

Marcello, Schaunard and Colline (*to the waiter who hurries back into the café while another comes out to lay the table*)
Quickly!

(*Rodolfo and Mimì reach the café.*)

Parpignol (*faintly at a distance*)
Who'll buy some pretty toys from Parpignol!

Rodolfo (*He joins his friends and introduces Mimì.*)
Two places.

Colline
So you've come then!

Rodolfo
Yes, we are here.
This is Mimì,
our pretty neighbour.
Our party is completed
now she has come to join us,
because I am the poet,
she is my inspiration.
Forth from my mind poems are flowing,
lilies and roses bloom at her touch,
and in our souls awakens
beautiful Love!

(*Marcello, Schaunard and Colline laugh.*)

Marcello (*ironically*)
Heavens! What lofty concepts!

Colline (*with a grave bow to Mimì*)
'Digna est intrari.'

Schaunard (*with mock dignity*)
'Ingrediat si necessit.'

Colline
I'll grant only an accessit!

(*All take their seats as the waiter returns.*)

Parpignol (*quite close*)
Who'll buy some pretty toys from Parpignol!

Colline (*Catching sight of the waiter, he shouts to him.*)
Some supper!

(*Enter Parpignol from the Rue Dauphin, pushing a barrow festooned with foliage, flowers and paper lanterns. He is surrounded by a crowd of merry urchins.*)

Children
Parpignol, Parpignol! Here is Parpignol!
With his pretty barrow bright with flowers!
I want the drum, I want the horse,
Yes, yes the drum,
I want the gun, I want the whip,
Get away! They are mine.

(*Urchins in a group wrangle round the barrow, while their scolding mothers approach, but their threats of punishment prove futile, for the children refuse to come away.*)

The Mothers (*with shrieks and threats*)
Ah! Get away you dirty little rascals!
Why are you out so late: it's past your bed-time!
Get home and to your beds you wicked rascals,
or you shall all have a painful beating!
Get home, you dirty little rascals! D'ye hear me?

(*One mother seizes her boy by the ear and he begins to whimper.*)

A Boy (*whimpering*)
Want a trumpet! Want a drum!

Schaunard
Bring some mutton.

Marcello (*looking at the menu and giving his orders in a loud voice*)
I'll have turkey!

Schaunard
And some Rhenish! And some lobster, only shell it!

Colline
Bring some burgundy!

Rodolfo
Mimì, what would you like?

Mimì
Some ice cream.

Schaunard (*with an air of supreme importance, addressing the waiter*)
Great occasion! She's a lady!

(*The mothers, relenting, determine to purchase toys from Parpignol, to the intense delight of the children. Parpignol moves on, down the Rue Vielle Comédie, the children merrily follow him pretending to play on their toy instruments.*)

Children
14 Long live Parpignol!
Buy the drum, buy the drum.
(*in the distance*) Get away, it is mine!

Marcello
Will you tell us Mimì, what loving present
did you get from Rodolfo?

Mimì
This little bonnet trimm'd with lace and roses,
very pretty,
do you not think it suits my fair complexion?
So many times I've set my very heart on such a
bonnet
and he discovered what my heart had longed for…
Now one who reads the heart's long hidden secrets
is a master, a mighty master.

Schaunard
A very great professor.

Colline
Our poet writes about the art of love from deep
experience.

Schaunard
That's why his lyric verse seems to have meaning.

Marcello
Oh sweetest dreams of hope and lover's fancies
you trust, you hope and all seems fair and
splendid.

Rodolfo
My friend, the most divine of all our poems
is that which truly teaches us to love.

Mimì
And surely love is sweeter far than honey, more
than honey.

Marcello
According to taste, it's honey or vinegar.

Mimì
Oh Heavens! I have hurt him.

Rodolfo
He's mourning for his love.

Schaunard and Colline
Now let's have a toast.

Marcello
Give me some more!

Mimì, Rodolfo and Marcello
Let's drown our
sorrows with more wine!
Drink up! Drink up!

All
Drink up!

Marcello
Bring me a bottle of Arsenic! She's here!

(*Enter from the corner of the Rue Mazarin an extremely pretty, coquettish-looking young lady. She is followed by a pompous old gentleman who is both fussy and overdressed.*)

Rodolfo (*surprised to see Musetta*)
Oh! Musetta!

Schaunard and Colline (*in amazement*)
Oh! Musetta!

Shop Women (*perceiving Musetta*)
Look! There! Yes! Musetta!
Oh! What swagger!
My! She's gorgeous!

(*Musetta walks swiftly and looking about her, as if in search of someone, while Alcindoro follows, panting and testy.*)

Alcindoro (*breathless*)
Just like a valet
I must run here and there.
No! No! Not for me!
I can stand no more!

Musetta (*as if calling a pet dog*)
Come, Lulu!

Schaunard
He's had a pretty good time, I reckon.

(*Musetta notices the friends seated at table outside the café and motions Alcindoro to secure the table which the townsfolk have just vacated.*)

Alcindoro
What's that, outside here?

Musetta
Sit here Lulu!

(*Alcindoro in a state of great irritation sits down and turns up his coat-collar.*)

Alcindoro (*grumbling*)
Do not employ these
endearments in public
for heaven's sake.

(*A waiter approaches to lay the cloth.*)

Musetta (*sits down facing the Café*)
Now don't be such a bore.

Colline (*scrutinizing Alcindoro*)
The naughty old seducer!

Marcello (*contemptuously*)
With his virgin Susanna!

Mimì (*to Rodolfo*)
And her clothes are lovely!

Rodolfo
Angels are always naked.

Mimì (*with curiosity*)
Do you know who she is?

Marcello
15 You had better ask me.
Her first name is Musetta;
Her surname is Temptation!
As to her vocation,
Like a reed in the breezes,
she will vary her love
and her lovers without number.
And like the spiteful raven,
a bird that's most rapacious,
and the food that she favours?
Is heart! Bloodthirsty raven!
She's drained my heart of blood.
So pass the turkey pie.

Musetta (*disconcerted at not being noticed by her friends*)
Marcello has seen me…
But he's not looking, the villain!
(*getting more irritated*)
That Schaunard is laughing!
Oh they make me so angry!
They will see how I fight
if they push me too far.
But meanwhile here I am
with this old doddering fool.
We'll see now!

Musetta (*shouting*)
Waiter, come here!
(*pointing to a plate as the waiter hurries over*)
Waiter, come here! This plate has a horrid smell
of onions!
(*She dashes the plate on the ground and the waiter picks up the pieces.*)

Alcindoro (*remonstrating*)
No, Musetta do be quiet!

Musetta (*aware that Marcello will not look round*)
He's not looking!

Alcindoro (*in mock despair*)
Gently! Gently! Gently! Watch your manners!

Musetta
No, he's not looking!
(*in a rage*) How I could beat him and beat him!

Alcindoro
What's the matter?

Musetta (*pettishly*)
I meant the waiter! Hold your tongue!
Leave me alone. I'll do just what I please!
I won't be ruled by you sir!
What a bore. Ah!

Alcindoro
Not so loud! Not so loud!

(*He takes up the menu and proceeds to order supper.*)

Colline
Oh! This chicken is tasty!

Schaunard
This wine is most delicious!

Work Girls and Students (*Crossing the stage, they stop short, and look at Musetta.*)
See her, see her, yes,
there she is, Musetta!
Ha! Ha!
(*They cross the stage.*)
Some old man is dining with her;
there she is, Musetta!
(*laughing*) Ha! Ha!

Musetta
Can he be jealous of this old mummy?
But wait! I'll get even, see if I don't,
I'll pay him back.

Alcindoro
Why this behaviour… Be quiet! Do be calm!

Schaunard (*to Colline*)
This must be the last act now!

Musetta (*at the top of her voice as she confronts Marcello*)
Why don't you look at me?

Alcindoro (*believing these words to be addressed to him*)
I am giving the order, dear!

Schaunard
And it's truly stupendous!

Colline
Stupendous!

Rodolfo (*to Mimì*)
I never could forgive you if
you behaved that way to me my darling.

Schaunard
She speaks to one because
the other listens.

Mimì (*to Rodolfo*)
I love you fondly, and I am yours forever.
Why then talk about forgiveness?

Colline (*to Schaunard*)
That other understands…
but he pretends he can't,
which makes her mad!

Musetta
But your heart's beating wildly!

Alcindoro
Do be quiet!

Musetta (*still seated, and markedly addressing Marcello, who shows signs of agitation*)
16 As thro' the street I wander on my way,
the people turn to look at me,
my beauty fascinates them, all eyes admire my charm, all eyes admire
my charm and my grace.

Marcello (*to his friends in a voice half choked by emotion*)
Just tie me to this chair.

Alcindoro (*in an agony of embarassment*)
What will all these people say?

Musetta
And with delight, I sense their silent vows
of love in the message of their glances
and then the joy of conquest fills my heart.
Ev'ry man is my prize!
(*rising*)
And so I fill them with desire as if by magic,
what rapture is mine!

Alcindoro (*Getting closer to Musetta, he tries to make her stop singing.*)
This odious singing upsets me entirely!

Musetta
And you that cherish the passion that betrayed you,
why should this have dismayed you?
I know deep in your heart though you won't say,
I know that you're dying of love!

Mimì
Oh, now I see that this unhappy girl here
really adores your friend Marcello.

(*Schaunard and Colline rise, and standing aside, watch the scene with interest, while Rodolfo and Mimì remain seated and continue their talk. Marcello nervously quits his seat, and is about to go, but is spell-bound by Musetta's voice.*)

Alcindoro
What will all the people say!

(*Alcindoro vainly endeavours to induce Musetta to resume her seat at the table, where supper is now ready.*)

Rodolfo
Marcello loved her once, then she left him without a word.
She thought she'd find something better.

Mimì
I feel compassion for her unhappy life!
(*nestling closer to Rodolfo*) Darling!

Rodolfo (*with his arm round Mimì's waist*)
Mimì!

Mimì
Yes, that poor girl fills my heart with sorrow!
The love's that born of passion ends in despair!
That poor unhappy girl.
Ah! She moves me to tears.

Rodolfo
Most faint the love that, when 'tis wounded, may not make reply!
None can revive a love that is dead!

Colline
Who knows what will happen now?
From the tempting wiles of females
I will always run away!
She is pretty, I don't doubt it,
but yet I'd rather smoke
my old pipe and read some Homer!

Schaunard
Soon Marcello will give in!
Who knows what will happen now.
But the snare to some is pleasant
to the hunter and the prey.

See the braggart in a moment
will give in! The fun grows
fast and furious!
Marcello will give in.
(*to Colline*)
If such a pretty woman
should but make an eye at you,
you'd forget your mouldy classics,
and you'd run to fetch her shoe!

Musetta
Ah! Marcello wavers,
Marcello is vanquished!
And tho' your heart is breaking
you'd never let us know!
(*obstinately to Alcindoro*)
I'll have my way, so don't you worry!
I will do just what I like,
so hold your tongue! I must try
to get rid of the old boy.
(*Pretending to suffer violent pain in her foot she sits down again.*)
Oh!

Alcindoro
What now?

Musetta
How it's aching, how it's burning!

Alcindoro
What is?

Musetta (*coyly showing her foot*)
My foot!
Break it! Tear it! I can't bear it!
Do, I beg you!
Close by there is a bootshop!
Hurry, quickly!

Alcindoro
What imprudence!

Musetta
He may have boots to please me!
Ah! The torture! How these
horrid tight shoes pinch me!
I'll not wear them.

Schaunard, Colline and Rodolfo
Her performance is stupendous!

Alcindoro
What will all these people say?
What imprudence!

Musetta (*She takes off her shoe and puts it on the table.*)
So there they are! (*impatiently*) Hurry! Go!
Hurry!
Say no more. Go!

Alcindoro (*He hides her shoe under his coat which he hastily buttons up and exits.*)
Nothing short of scandal!
Musetta! Shame!

Marcello
Happy mem'ries not yet have you vanished
and nor have I forgotten you!
If you came knocking at my door
how, my heart would go out to you, my love,
O my love!

(*Musetta and Marcello embrace with much fervour.*)

Musetta
Marcello!

Marcello
Enchantress!

Schaunard
We have reach'd the finale!

(*A waiter brings in the bill.*)

Rodolfo, Schaunard and Colline (*in amazement*)
The bill!

Schaunard
Why the hurry?

Colline
17 Who had him bring it?

Schaunard (*to the waiter*)
Let's see.

(*After looking at it he hands it round.*)

Rodolfo and Colline (*examining the bill*)
Heav'n!

Rodolfo, Schaunard and Colline
Out with your coppers!

Schaunard
Colline, Rodolfo and you, Marcello!

Marcello
We have no money!

Schaunard
What's that?

Rodolfo
I've thirty sous I tell you!

Marcello, Schaunard and Colline (*amazed*)
Really. No more than that?

Schaunard (*sternly*)
But where's my treasure gone?

(*They all feel their pockets which are empty; no one can explain the sudden disappearance of Schaunard's money; and they look at each other in surprise. The people hasten from the left. As the tattoo is still a long way off, the folks run hither, as if uncertain from which quarter the band will approach.*)

Citizens (*hastening from the right*)
Here they come!

Street Arabs
Will they come along this way?

Work Girls and Students
No, from there!

(*Several windows are opened, at which mothers with their children appear and eagerly await the coming of the Patrol.*)

Street Arabs (*pointing in an uncertain fashion the opposite way*)
They are coming down this way!
Yes, here they come!

Work Girls and Students
Here they come!

Citizens and Hawkers (*running from the back*)
Way, there, way, there!

Some Boys (*from the windows*)
Just let me see!
Just let me hear!
Mummy, just let me see!
Lisetta, do be quiet!
Papa, just let me hear!
Tonio, do have done!

(*The crowd fills the stage; the tattoo advances gradually from the left.*)

Work Girls and Students
They will come along this way!

Hawkers
Yes, this way!

Some Boys
Now it's coming, the parade.

A Mother
Do be quiet, do have done!

Street Arabs
When the patrol gets here
let's all go along beside it!

(*The shop-people close their shops and come out into the street.*)

Hawkers
In that parade you see our great country's noble might!

Musetta (*to the waiter*)
And the bill – give it to me.
(*to the waiter who presents the bill*)
Thank you! Just make
one bill out of the two.
(*The waiter adds the two amounts together.*)
You will be paid by the man who came with me!

Rodolfo, Marcello, Schaunard and Colline
(*pointing to where Alcindoro went out, in comic fashion*)
Yes, he will pay!

(*The waiter hands the two bills to Musetta.*)

Musetta (*placing both bills at Alcindoro's place*)
When he returns he'll find this token of my admiration.

Rodolfo, Marcello, Schaunard and Colline
When he returns he'll find this token of her admiration.

Crowd
Hey! look out, they're coming here!
Do stand back, they're coming here!
Make way there!

Rodolfo, Marcello, Schaunard and Colline
See, the patrol is coming!
Be careful the boy doesn't
catch us with his darling!
Now the crowd is tremendous,
to dodge him will be easy!
Quickly! Quickly! Quickly!

(*Enter from the left the military Tattoo, headed by a gigantic Drum-major who dexterously twists his baton, showing the way.*)

The Crowd (*pointing gleefully*)
And there's the drum major!

As proudly as warriors of old
they go marching by!
Look at the drums go by!
Now the parade goes by!
See! There he goes, the tall drum-major bold!
With noble pride the staff of gold
he proudly twists and turns!
The greatest man in France,
The tall drum-major bold!
The staff of gold he proudly twists and turns!

Rodolfo, Marcello, Schaunard and Colline
Long live Musetta, Queen of our hearts!
Glory and pride,
the Latin quarter hails its glorious Queen!

COMPACT DISC TWO

Act III

The Barrière d'Enfer

Beyond the toll-gate, the outer boulevard is formed in the background by the Orleans high-road, half hidden by tall houses and the misty gloom of February. To the left is a tavern with a small open space in front of the toll-gate. To the right is the Boulevard d'Enfer; to the left that of St Jacques. On the right also there is the entrance to the Rue d'Enfer leading to the Quartier Latin.

Over the tavern, as its sign-board, hangs Marcello's picture 'The Passage of the Red Sea', while underneath in large letters is the inscription 'At the Port of Marseilles'. On either side of the door are frescoes of a Turk and a Zouave with a huge laurel wreath round his fez. From the ground-floor windows of the tavern facing the toll-gate, light gleams. The plane-trees, grey and gaunt, which flank the toll-gate square lead diagonally towards the two boulevards. Between each tree is a marble bench. It is towards the close of February; snow covers all.

(*As the curtain rises the scene is merged in the dim light of early dawn. In front of a brazier are seated, in a group, snoring custom-house officers. From the tavern at intervals one may hear laughter, shouts, and the clink of glasses. A customhouse official comes out of the tavern with wine. The toll-gate is closed. Behind the toll-gate, stamping their feet and blowing on their frost-bitten fingers, stand several street scavengers.*)

Scavengers
1 Hallo! You soldiers! Admit us! (*more vigorously*)
Wake up!
Be quick and let us pass! We are the sweepers!
(*stamping their feet*) It's very cold here. Hallo! We are frozen!

Customs Official (*yawning and stretching himself*)
Coming!

(*He goes to open the gate; the scavengers pass through to the Rue d'Enfer. The official closes the gate again. From the tavern can be heard the clink of glasses, forming an accompaniment to the song.*)

Voices (*from within*)
Fill the glass! Each toast his love.
So fill the glass! Let each toast his love.

Each one as he drinks, as he drinks his wine,
shall dream of lips made for love divine!
Tralleralle, tralleralle, tralleralle…

Musetta (*from the tavern*)
Ah! The drinker loves his glass,
the lover loves his lass!

Milk Women (*from within*)
Houp-là! Houp-là!

Customs Official
The women for the market place!

(*A sergeant comes out of the guard-house, and orders the toll-gate to be opened.*)

Carters (*from within*)
Houp-là!

(*Carts pass along the outer Boulevard, lighted by large lanterns. The gloom gradually gives way to daylight.*)

Milk Women (*to the officials who admit them through the toll-gate*)
Good morning!
(*They move off in various directions.*)

(*It stops snowing.*)

Peasant Women (*paying the toll and going on*)
Cheese and butter!
Eggs and poultry!
And you, where are you going?
To old Saint Michael's.
And shall we see you later?
At half past twelve!

(*They move off in various directions. The officials remove the bench and the brazier. Enter Mimì from the Rue d'Enfer: she looks about as if anxious to make sure of her whereabouts. On reaching the first plane-tree, she is seized by a violent fit of coughing. Then recovering herself, she sees the sergeant whom she approaches.*)

Mimì (*to the Sergeant*)
2 Oh, please sir, tell me, do you know the tavern…
(*unable to recollect the name*) where a painter is working.

Customs Sergeant (*pointing to the cabaret*)
There it is.

Mimì
Thank you.
(*A serving woman comes out of the tavern: Mimì goes up to her.*)
Oh! my good woman, pray do me this favour!
Can you find me the painter;
Marcello? I wish to see him! The matter is urgent!
Just tell him quietly that Mimì is waiting.

(*The woman goes to the inn.*)

Customs Sergeant (*to a passer-by*)
Eh, in that basket!

Customs Official (*after searching the basket*)
Empty!

Customs Sergeant
Pass!

(*Other folk now pass through the toll-gate and move off in different directions. The bell of the Hospice*

Saint Thérèse rings for matins. Day has now come; a sad murky winter's day; sundry couples, homeward bound, quit the tavern. Marcello comes out of the inn.)

Marcello (*amazed*)
3 Mimì!

Mimì
I hoped that I would find you here.

Marcello
Yes, we've been here for a month;
so, to pay for our lodging
Musetta teaches singing to those who come here,
and I am painting warriors,
here, on the house-front.
It's cold here. Come in now.

Mimì
Where's Rodolfo?

Marcello
Here.

Mimì
I cannot go inside.

Marcello
Why not?

Mimì (*in despair*)
Ah! Good Marcello! Help us!

Marcello
Tell me what happened.

Mimì
Rodolfo loves me yet shuns me!
My dear Rodolfo is jealous, madly jealous.
A glance, a gesture,
a gift or flow'r will rouse in him suspicions,
waking his wrath and anger.
And then at night pretending to be sleeping,
I feel his eyes are watching,
to spy upon my slumbers.
He cries at ev'ry moment
'You're not for me. Go find another lover.'
I cannot bear it.
It's jealousy that drives him,
I know. What can I say to him Marcello?

Marcello
It would surely be better
if you did not live together.
I'm happy with Musetta, and she's happy
with me, it's joy that binds us both together…
Laughter, music, and song
are the flow'rs of our love!

Mimì
You are right, much better to leave him.
Will you help us, please, will you help us to part?
So many times we have tried it. But we cannot!
You are right. Ah so right.
To part would be best.
Won't you help us, I beg you!

Marcello
All right, I'll try. I'll go and wake him.

Mimì
Wake him?

Marcello
He came back just before
the day was breaking, fell asleep
upon a bench there.
(*motioning Mimì to look through the tavern-window*)
You see him?
(*compassionately*)
You're coughing!

Mimì (*coughing persistently*)
Unceasingly it shakes me.
Last night Rodolfo left me
and said to me 'It is over!'
I left the house at daybreak
then hurried here
to find him.

Marcello (*watching Rodolfo inside the tavern*)
He's waking…
rising, and calls me… he's coming.

Mimì
He must not see me.

Marcello
Go home at once now,
Mimì for heaven's sake.
Don't make a scene out here.

Rodolfo (*Coming out of the inn, he hastens towards Marcello.*)
4 Marcello, you're outside here.
No-one can hear us.
The time has come for me to leave Mimì.

Marcello
Are you sure that is true?

Rodolfo
Yes, once before all seemed over,
passion had fled,
then her blue eyes their glory on me shed…
Love reawakened.
Now the torture returns.

(*Mimì warily approaches, to listen.*)

Marcello
Do you wish to revive the pain that's past?

Rodolfo (*sadly*)
Yes! Always!

Marcello
Change your mind then.
A love so dark and gloomy
will only end in sadness.
Love must bring joy and gladness
or else it is just worthless.
But you are jealous.

Rodolfo
A little.

Marcello
Intemperate and changeable and a victim
of vile suspicion, impatient and stubborn!

Mimì (*aside*)
What is he saying? What shall I do?

Rodolfo (*with bitter irony*)
5 Mimì is fickle-hearted,

always flirting with someone. A scented dandy
of noble fam'ly
tries to win her caresses.
With shoulders swaying, one tiny foot
displaying,
she bestows all the magic of her smile.

Marcello
Shall I be frank? That is simply not true.

Rodolfo
Well, you are right, it's not true. In vain, in vain
I'm hiding
all the torture that racks me.
I love Mimì, she is my only treasure, I love her!
But I am frightened!
(*Mimì, astonished, comes closer and closer, under cover of the trees.*)
6 Mimì's so sickly, so ailing!
Ev'ry day she grows weaker.
That poor unhappy girl
is surely dying!
Wracked by incessant coughing,
her frail being is shaken,
in her wasted features, fev'rish fires awaken.

Marcello (*Fearing Mimì may overhear them, he tries to keep Rodolfo further off.*)
Mimì!?!

Mimì
What's he saying?

Marcello (*agitatedly, perceiving that Mimì is listening*)
Oh our poor Mimì!

Mimì
Alas, I'm dying!

Rodolfo
And my room's like a squalid
prison cell, no fire to warm her…
Only the cruel night wind
wails cold and cheerless.
She is merry and smiling,
while remorse overwhelms me.
For the fever that wracks her,
I feel so guilty!

Marcello (*eager to draw Rodolfo aside*)
What can help her?

Mimì (*disconsolately and in tones of anguish*)
All is over.
Alas! Alas! All is over!
Life and loving, all are ended!
For Mimì must die!

Marcello
What can we do?
We must help her
Oh our poor Mimì!

Rodolfo
Mimì's like a flower.
Want has wasted her beauty,
and to bring her back to life
would need far more than love.

(*Mimì's violent coughing and sobbing reveal her presence.*)

Rodolfo (*rushing towards Mimì*)
You Mimì! You here?
You overheard me?

Marcello
Then she must have been list'ning!

Rodolfo
Surely by now you know me,
I worry over nothing!
Come let's go inside.

(*He tries to take her into the tavern.*)

Mimì
No, inside there I'd suffocate!

Rodolfo (*affectionately embracing Mimì*)
Ah, Mimì!

(*Musetta's brazen laugh is heard from the tavern.*)

Marcello (*running to look through the window*)
It's Musetta that's laughing.
Laughing, flirting! Ah! what a hussy!
I'll not allow it!

Mimì (*disengaging herself from Rodolfo's embrace*)
Farewell then.

Rodolfo (*surprised*)
What! Going?

Mimì
7 To the home that she left
at the voice of her lover, sad,
forsaken Mimì must turn back heavy-hearted.
Once more she'll be returning
to tend her lifeless flowers.
Farewell, then, I wish you well!
Just one more favour.
Gather those few poor things I left
there behind me. Inside my trunk
you will find them. That small chain of gold,
the prayer book you gave me.
Please put them all together safe in my apron,
I will send round to fetch them…
Listen, under the pillow you'll find my little bonnet.
Perhaps… perhaps… you'd like to keep it to remember our love!
Goodbye then.
Goodbye! I wish you well!

Rodolfo
8 Then it really is over.
You are going, you're going, little darling.
Farewell, O sweet dream of love!
Farewell, to our dreamy existence…
Enlivened by your smiling…

Mimì
Farewell, awaking beside you
when day is breaking!…
Farewell to jealousy and anger!
Farewell suspicion!

Rodolfo
Kisses.

Mimì
…and all its bitter sadness.

Rodolfo
…which as lover and poet
I rhymed with joy and gladness!

Mimì
Lonely in winter with death as sole companion!
Yet the lovely springtime brings the glorious sun!

Rodolfo
Lonely, with death as sole companion!
Yet the lovely springtime brings the glorious sun!

(*From the tavern a sound of breaking plates and glasses is heard.*)

Marcello (*from within*)
I can guess what you were doing.
You were flirting with that stranger.

Musetta (*from within*)
What d'you mean?
(*She runs out.*)

Mimì
I'm not lonely in spring.

Marcello (*He stops on the threshold of the inn and confronts Musetta.*)
And how you coloured
when I caught you in the corner!
You're so frivolous, Musetta!

Musetta (*defiantly*)
That poor fellow simply asked me:
'Are you very fond of dancing.'
I was blushing when I answered:
'I'd be dancing all day long, Sir!'

Rodolfo
As comrades you've lilies and roses…

Mimì
Forth from each nest there comes a gentle murmur.

Marcello
You are lying, and you know it.
I will teach you better manners
if I catch you once more flirting!

Musetta
I will do just what I like!
Oh what nonsense!

Rodolfo and Mimì
When the hawthorn bough's in blossom
we've the glorious sun!
Silvery fountains murmur…
the breezes of the evening
bring hope and solace,
calming human sorrow,
Far better to wait for spring to come again?

Musetta
Why this anger? Why this fury?
We're not married yet, thank goodness!
I detest that sort of lover
who pretends he is… ah! ah! ah!… your husband!
I shall flirt just when it suits me!
Yes, your lordship
I shall flirt just when it suits me!
Musetta's going away, yes, going away!
Fare you well, Sir!
Good sir, farewell with all my heart.

Marcello
You shall not do as you like Miss.
I'm the master, don't forget it.
I'm not going to be your plaything
just because you're fond of flirting.

You're so frivolous, Musetta!
So you're going. God be with you,
I can only say good riddance.
Fare you well Ma'am!
Farewell, Ma'am! Pray begone.

Musetta (*She retreats in a fury; but suddenly stops.*)
Call yourself a painter?

Marcello
Viper!

Musetta (*shouting*)
Pig!

Marcello
Slut!
(*He enters the tavern.*)

Mimì (*moving away with Rodolfo*)
Always yours forever!

Rodolfo and Mimì
We'll be together till the spring returns.

Mimì
Ah, that our winter
might last for ever! (*moving off*)

Rodolfo and Mimì (*off stage*)
We part no more until the spring returns.

Act IV

In the Attic

(*Marcello, as before, stands in front of his easel, while Rodolfo sits at his writing-table; each trying to make the other believe that he is working indefatigably, whereas both are really only gossiping.*)

Marcello (*resuming his talk*)
9 In a coupé?

Rodolfo
In a carriage and pair.
She greeted me so gaily. Well, 'Musetta!'
I asked her: 'How's your heart?' 'Not beating or I don't feel it,
thanks to this velvet I'm wearing.'

Marcello (*endeavouring to laugh*)
Delighted to hear it.

Rodolfo (*aside*)
You can't fool me. You're fretting and fuming.
(*He resumes his work.*)

Marcello
Not beating. Bravo!
(*He begins to paint with great vigour.*)
And I noticed…

Rodolfo
Musetta?

Marcello
Mimì.

Rodolfo (*as he breathlessly stops writing*)
You saw her?
(*recovering his composure*) How curious!

Marcello (*stops painting*)
Out in her carriage
arrayed in splendour, just like a duchess.

Rodolfo
Delightful!
I'm glad to hear it.

Marcello (*aside*)
You liar, you're pining with love.

Rodolfo
Back to work!

Marcello
Back to work.

(*They go on working.*)

Rodolfo (*He throws down his pen.*)
This pen is useless.

Marcello (*He flings away his brush.*)
What a filthy old paint brush!

(*He stares at his canvas, and then, without Rodolfo observing it, he takes from his pocket a bunch of ribbons and kisses it.*)

Rodolfo
10 Oh Mimì, our love is over.
Oh days departed,
hands pale and slender and soft fragrant tresses!
Ah, snowy forehead! Ah, Mimì. Oh golden days of youth.
(*From the table-drawer he takes out Mimì's old bonnet.*)
And… you her little bonnet,
she left you behind the day she departed,
you recall the days of our youth and joy,
come to my heart,
lie close against my heart, for our love is dead!

Marcello (*putting away the ribbons and staring anew at his canvas*)
I know not how this brush
of mine continues to labour
and paints on these colours
quite against my will?
And though I would be painting
fields and meadows in winter or in springtime
here on my canvas two bright eyes torment me,
two red lips smile upon me.
The features of Musetta haunt me still!
Ah!… here I see Musetta,
so fair and so alluring, I still miss her.
My grief affords her pleasure
yet my foolish heart longs to call her name,
and hold her in my arms!

Rodolfo (*He clasps the bonnet to his heart; then endeavouring to conceal his emotion from Marcello, he carelessly questions him.*)
What is the time now?

Marcello (*Roused by Rodolfo from his reverie, he gaily replies.*)
Time for our yesterday's dinner!

Rodolfo
And Schaunard's not back yet?

(*Enter Schaunard and Colline; the former carries four rolls; and the latter a paper bag.*)

Schaunard
Here we are.

Rodolfo and Marcello
Well then?

(*Schaunard places the rolls on the table.*)

Marcello (*disdainfully*)
Some bread?

Colline (*Taking a herring out of the bag he puts it on the table as well.*)
A dish that's worthy of Demosthenes. A herring!

Schaunard
It's salted!

Colline
The meal is ready now!

(*Seating themselves at the table, they pretend to be having a fine meal.*)

Marcello
This is a food that's
fit for a banquet.

Schaunard (*He places Colline's hat on the table and thrusts a bottle of water into it.*)
Now we must put the
champagne on ice.

Rodolfo (*to Marcello, offering him some bread*)
Choose, Royal Highness,
lobster or salmon?

(*His offer is accepted. When turning to Schaunard, he proffers another crust of bread.*)

Marcello
Baron, here's a nightingale's
tongue in brandy.

Schaunard (*He politely declines, and pours out a glass of water which he hands to Marcello.*)
Thank you, too fattening!
This evening, I'm dancing.

(*The one and only tumbler is handed about. Colline, after voraciously devouring his roll, rises.*)

Rodolfo (*to Colline*)
What? Finished?

Colline (*with an air of importance*)
I've business!
The king awaits me!

Marcello (*eagerly*)
What plot is brewing?

Rodolfo
What's going on?

Schaunard (*He rises and approaches Colline, observing with droll inquisitiveness.*)
What's going on?

Marcello
What's going on?

Colline (*strutting up and down, full of self-importance*)
The king requires me at his side.

Rodolfo, Marcello and Schaunard (*Surrounding Colline, they make low curtseys to him.*)
Bravo!

Colline (*with a patronising air*)
And then…
I go to see Guizot.

Schaunard (*to Marcello*)
Give me a goblet!

Marcello (*giving him the only glass*)
It's vintage champagne!

Schaunard (*solemnly getting on a chair and raising his glass*)
Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking…

Rodolfo (*interrupting*)
Stop that!

Colline (*taking the glass from Schaunard*)
Stop that! No more fooling!

Marcello
Stop that! No more nonsense!

Colline (*taking the glass from Schaunard*)
Give me that tumbler!

Schaunard (*motioning his friends to let him speak*)
With ardour irresistible
poetry fills my spirit…

Rodolfo, Marcello and Colline (*yelling*)
No!

Schaunard (*complacently*)
Then something choreographic
may suit you…

(*They surround Schaunard and make him get off the chair.*)

Rodolfo, Marcello and Colline
Yes, yes!

Schaunard
Some dancing,
accompanied by singing!

Colline
Let's clear the stage for action!

(*Moving chairs and table aside, they prepare for a dance. They suggest various dances.*)
11 Gavotta.

Marcello
Minuetto.

Rodolfo
Pavanella.

Schaunard (*imitating a Spanish measure*)
Fandango.

Colline
I vote we dance quadrilles first.

(*The others approve.*)

Rodolfo
Here's to the ladies.

Colline (*pretending to be very busy arranging a quadrille*)
I'll lead it.

Schaunard (*Improvising, he beats time with comic pomposity of manner.*)
Lallera, lallera, la.

Rodolfo (*He approaches Marcello and, bowing very low, offers him his hand and says gallantly*)
Oh, maiden fair and gentle!

Marcello (*with coy bashfulness of manner, counterfeiting a woman's voice*)
My modesty respect, Sir,
(*in his ordinary voice*) I beg you!

(*Rodolfo and Marcello dance a quadrille.*)

Colline
Balancez!

Schaunard (*teasing*)
First there's the Chain.

Colline
No, stupid!

(*Rodolfo and Marcello continue dancing.*)

Schaunard (*with exaggerated contempt*)
You've manners like a clown.

Colline
As I take it,
you're insulting!
(*rushing to the fireplace and seizing the tongs*)
Draw your sword, sir!

Schaunard (*taking up the poker*)
Ready!
On guard there.
(*preparing to receive his adversary's attack*)
Only blood can quench my thirst!

(*Rodolfo and Marcello stop dancing and burst out laughing.*)

Colline
One of us shall now be gutted!

Schaunard
Go and get a stretcher ready!

Colline
And prepare a grave as well.

(*Schaunard and Colline have a duel.*)

Rodolfo (*gaily*)
While they beat
each other's brains out,
our fandango
we will finish.

(*Rodolfo and Marcello dance behind the duellists; blows fall faster. The duellists pretend to grow more and more incensed. The door opens and Musetta enters in a state of great agitation.*)

Marcello (*noticing her*)
Musetta!

Musetta
12 It's Mimì…
It's Mimì who is with me and is ailing.

(*Through the open door Rodolfo spies Mimì seated on the topmost stair.*)

Rodolfo
Mimì?

Musetta
She has no strength to climb up the staircase.

Rodolfo (*He rushes to Mimì; Marcello follows his example.*)
Ah!

Schaunard (*to Colline; they both drag the bed forward*)
Let her rest here for a moment.

(*Musetta brings a glass of water and makes Mimì sip it. Rodolfo and Marcello support Mimì and lead her towards the bed.*)

Rodolfo
There! some water.

Mimì (*passionately*)
Rodolfo!

Rodolfo (*gently lowering her on to the bed*)
Gently lie down here.

Mimì (*embracing Rodolfo*)
O my Rodolfo! Please let me
stay with you!

Rodolfo
Darling Mimì, now and always.

(*Rodolfo induces Mimì to lie down at full length on the bed, and draws the coverlet over her; he then carefully adjusts the pillow beneath her head.*)

Musetta (*Taking the others aside, she whispers to them.*)
I heard them saying that Mimì had fled
from her wealthy lover and now was almost dying.
Ah, but where? Searching, searching, I met her
alone just now,
almost dead with exhaustion.
She murmured 'I am dying,
dying! (*excitedly raising her voice*) But listen!
I want to die near him; perhaps he's waiting…
Take me to him Musetta…'

Marcello
Hush!

Mimì
I feel so much better…
all here seems just the same as ever!
(*with a sweet smile*)
Ah, I'm so happy now I'm here.
I feel better, so much better.
(*Raising herself somewhat she again embraces Rodolfo.*)
Once more new life returns to me.
Ah! beloved do not go.

Rodolfo
Oh my love, my treasure!
Once more enchant me!

Musetta (*aside to the other three*)
What is there to give her?
Any wine, or coffee?

Marcello (*in great dejection*)
Nothing! There is nothing.

Schaunard (*He looks closely at Mimì .Sadly to Colline as he takes him aside.*)
In an hour she'll be dead.

Mimì
I feel so cold! I wish I had my muff here!
My poor hands are simply frozen, how shall I get
them warm?
(*She coughs.*)

Rodolfo (*He takes Mimì's hands in his, and chafes them.*)
In mine, in mine love!
Please do not speak, it tires you.

Mimì
It is the coughing,
I'm used to that, though.

(*Seeing Rodolfo's friends, she calls them by name, when they hasten to her side.*)
Good morning Marcello,
Schaunard, Colline, good morning.
You're all here, you're all here…
glad to welcome Mimì.

Rodolfo
Hush, Mimì, do not talk.

Mimì
I'll speak low.
Don't be frighten'd.
(*motioning Marcello to approach*)
Marcello let me tell you.
She is good your Musetta.

Marcello (*giving Musetta his hand*)
I know, I know.

(*Schaunard and Colline mournfully withdraw. The former sits at the table, burying his face in his hands. The latter is a prey to sad thoughts.*)

Musetta (*Drawing Marcello away from Mimì, she takes off her earrings and gives them to him as she whispers.*)
Take these, sell them, and buy her
something to drink; send for a doctor!

Rodolfo
To sleep now.

Mimì
You will not leave me?

(*Mimì gradually grows drowsy: Rodolfo takes a chair and sits down beside the bed.*)

Rodolfo
No! No!

Musetta
But listen! Maybe what she has ask'd for
will be her last request on earth, little darling!
I'll go and fetch the muff, I'll come with you.

Marcello
How good you are, Musetta!

(*Musetta and Marcello hastily go out.*)

Colline (*While Marcello and Musetta are talking, he removes his over-coat.*)
13 Venerable garment, listen,
I'll say goodbye, for we
must be parted from each other.
I salute you, dear brother.
These faded shoulders never deign'd
to bow to rich man or to mighty;
often deep in these pockets
you have sheltered in silence
philosophers and poets.
Now that our pleasant friendship
must end, I bid you farewell,
old companion tried and tested
Farewell! Farewell!
(*Colline folds up the coat, puts it under his arm and is about to go, but seeing Schaunard, he approaches him, pats him on the back, and mournfully exclaims:*)
Schaunard, quite possibly our methods differ,
but now together two kindly acts we'll do
(*pointing to the coat*) mine's this one; and yours…
leave them alone in here.

Schaunard (*overcome with emotion*)
Philosopher, you're right.
(*looking towards the bed*) You're right, I'll go!

(*Schaunard looks about him; then, to justify his exit, he takes up the water-bottle and goes out after Colline, gently closing the door. Mimì opens her eyes and, seeing that all have gone, holds out her hand to Rodolfo who affectionately kisses it.*)

Mimì
14 Have they left us? (*Rodolfo nods.*) I was not really sleeping,
but I wanted to be alone with you, love.
So many things remain for me to tell you;
or just one that is vaster than the ocean,
(*raising herself somewhat, with Rodolfo's help*)
as the ocean so deep and never ending.
(*putting her arms round Rodolfo's neck*)
You are my life, my only love, my darling,
you are my love, and all in life I treasure!

Rodolfo
Oh! Mimì, my lovely Mimì!

Mimì (*letting her arms drop*)
You still think I'm pretty?

Rodolfo
Fair as dawn in the springtime.

Mimì
No, no, you're mistaken.
You mean to say fair as sunset in autumn.
'I'm always called Mimì,…
(*like an echo*) but I don't know why.'

Rodolfo (*in tender, caressing tones*)
Back to her nest comes the swallow in the springtime.

(*He takes out the bonnet and gives it to Mimì.*)

Mimì (*gaily*)
My little bonnet!
(*She motions to Rodolfo to put the bonnet on her head. Mimì makes Rodolfo sit next to her and rests her head on his breast.*)
Do you remember how we met that evening
when by chance I came here?

Rodolfo
Yes I remember.

Mimì
This room was all in darkness...

Rodolfo
You were anxious and frighten'd!
And your key… how you lost it.

Mimì
And in the darkness you tried so hard to find it.

Rodolfo
Yes, searching, searching…

Mimì
You my fine young poet,
now can I tell you frankly
that you soon managed to find it.

Rodolfo
I thought Fate needed helping.

Mimì (*remembering her first meeting with Rodolfo on Christmas Eve*)
It was dark, and all my blushes were unnoticed…
(*She faintly repeats Rodolfo's words.*)
'Your tiny hand is frozen!
Let me warm it into life!'
It was dark and you took my hand so gently.

(*A sudden spasm half suffocates her; she sinks back fainting.*)

Rodolfo (*raising her up in alarm*)
Oh! God! Mimì!

(*At this moment, Schaunard returns and hearing Rodolfo's exclamation, hastens to the bedside.*)

Schaunard
What's wrong?

Mimì (*She opens her eyes and smilingly reassures Rodolfo and Schaunard.*)
Nothing, I'm better.

Rodolfo (*gently lowering her*)
Gently, for heaven's sake.

Mimì
Yes, yes, forgive me,
now it's over.

(*Musetta and Marcello cautiously enter, Musetta is carrying a muff; her companion a phial.*)

Musetta (*to Rodolfo*)
15 Sleeping?

Rodolfo (*approaching Marcello*)
Just resting.

Marcello
I have just seen the doctor.
He'll come. I said it was urgent.
(*He takes a spirit-lamp, and placing it on the table, lights it.*)
Here is the medicine.

Mimì
Who is it?

Musetta (*She approaches Mimì and gives her the muff.*)
Here, Musetta.

Mimì (*Helped by Musetta, she sits up in bed and with almost childlike glee seizes the muff.*)
Oh, see how soft and warm it is. No more,
will my fingers be frozen, for this muff
will keep them warm.
(*to Rodolfo*)
Did you buy this Rodolfo?

Musetta
Yes.

Mimì (*stretching out her hand to Rodolfo*)
You! what a spendthrift! Thank you, it cost you dear.
(*Rodolfo bursts into tears*)
Weeping? I'm better.
Why should you weep like this?
My love always with you!
(*She thrusts her hand into the muff; then she gradually grows drowsy, gracefully nodding her head, as one who is overcome by sleep.*)
My hands are much warmer; and I'll sleep.

Rodolfo (*Reassured at seeing Mimì fall asleep, he gently moves away from the bedside and motioning the others not to make any noise, he approaches Marcello.*)
16 What did the doctor say?

Marcello
He'll come.

(*Rodolfo, Marcello and Schaunard whisper together. Every now and then Rodolfo goes on tip-toe to the bed and then rejoins his companions. Meanwhile, Musetta is busily heating the medicine brought by Marcello over the spirit-lamp, as she unconsciously murmurs a prayer.*)

Musetta
Oh Mary, blessed Virgin,
look down in mercy on a soul that suffers.
Grant that death may not take her.
(*Interrupting, she bids Marcello place a book upright on the table, so as to shade the lamp.*)
There should be some protection
because the light is flickering.
That's right.
(*resuming her prayer*)
Grant that she may recover.
Most Holy Mother I am not
worthy of forgiveness,
but our little Mimì's
an angel come from heaven!

Rodolfo (*He approaches Musetta while Schaunard advances on tip-toe to the bedside. With a sorrowful gesture he goes back to Marcello.*)
I still have hope. Do you think it can be serious?

Musetta
Not really.

Schaunard (*in a hoarse voice*)
Marcello, she is dead!

(*Marcello in his turn goes up to the bed and retreats in alarm. A ray of sunshine falls through the window upon Mimì's face; Musetta points to her cloak which Rodolfo takes with a grateful glance, and, standing upon a chair, endeavours to form a screen by stretching the cloak across the window-pane.*)

Colline (*He gently enters and puts some money on the table near Musetta.*)
Musetta, for you!
(*He hurries to help Rodolfo stretch the cloak, as he asks him how Mimì is.*)
How is she?

Rodolfo
Look. She is sleeping.
(*Turning round, he sees Musetta, who makes a sign to him that the medicine is ready. Getting off the chair, he is suddenly aware of the strange demeanour of Marcello and Schaunard. Huskily, almost in a speaking voice*)
What is wrong? Why all this coming and
going?
Why do you look at me like that?
(*He glances from one to the other in consternation.*)

CHAN 3008 BOOK.qxd 15/10/07 10:39 am Page 98

Marcello (*Unable to bear up any longer, he hastens to embrace Rodolfo, as he murmurs*)
Be brave!

Rodolfo (*He flings himself on Mimì's bed, lifts her up, shakes her by the hand, and exclaims in tones of anguish*)
Mimì!… Mimì!…

(*He falls sobbing on her lifeless form. Terror-struck, Musetta rushes to the bed; then she kneels sobbing at the foot of the bed. Schaunard, overcome, sinks back into a chair, to the left Colline stands at the foot of the bed, dazed at the suddenness of this catastrophe. Marcello, sobbing, turns his back to the foot-lights.*)

Translation: William Grist and Percy Pinkerton, with amendments by David Parry

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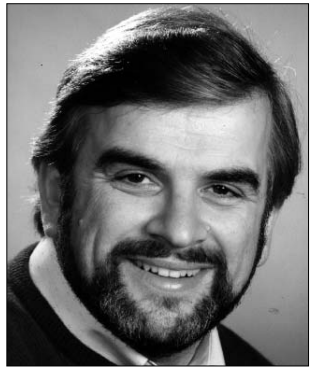

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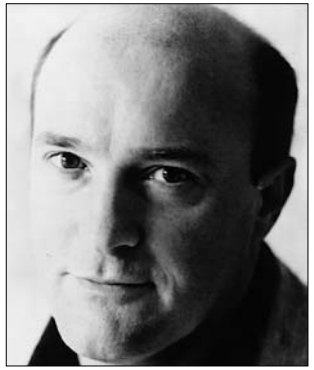

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Colline, a philosopher ..... Alastair Miles *bass*
Schaunard, a musician ..... William Dazeley *baritone*
Benoit, the landlord ..... Andrew Shore *baritone*
Mimì ..... Cynthia Haymon *soprano*
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